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THE DOCTRINE OF ANNIHILATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

67767

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PREFACE.

A CHRISTIAN MINISTER has no need to explain his reasons, in these days, for directing the attention of his congregation to the subject of the following discourses. It is in itself of absorbing interest; and it is occupying so deeply the minds of thoughtful Christian men and women, that the full consideration of it has become imperative.

At the same time, I should not have taken it up just at this moment, when the time and the strength which I can give to it are limited, but that I happened quite recently to be in the chair, as Chairman for the year of the Board of Congregational Ministers in London, when during three successive meetings the subject was very earnestly discussed. As Chairman, I took no part in the discussion; indeed, I do not think that large and deep theological questions like this are well suited for debate; but I felt bound in honesty, as I could not perfectly accord with any of the various views which were advanced, to

take the earliest opportunity of stating in my own way what and why I believed.

There can be no question that the doctrine of the Annihilation of the Wicked has been making considerable progress of late, mainly, I believe, as a refuge from the terrible idea of eternal torment. Believing as I do that the doctrine of annihilation is a miserable doctrine, and seeing that the whole subject is one of profound and pressing interest, I felt called to offer to my congregation, many of whom I knew to be perplexed and anxious about this and kindred questions, such guidance as might be in my power, towards the formation of sound views on these vital topics of Christian truth.

But I was by no means prepared, when I announced the course of Lectures, for the widespread interest which they seem to have excited. That interest is largely due, no doubt, to the immense publicity which the Editor of the 'Christian World,' with that courage and love of free enquiry which have always been conspicuous in the conduct of that journal, has accorded to them. At the same time the flood of communications, most of them kindly and sympathetic, which has poured in upon me, and for which I offer to the writers my hearty thanks, shows how very deeply the minds of all classes are being stirred by these questions, and how impossible it is that

the full and free discussion of them should be long delayed. I am but obeying a very general request in publishing these discourses in a more permanent form, with such alterations and additions, none of them material, as seemed needful; and I have sent them forth in the hope that they may stimulate this free discussion, and help, if but a little, not towards the unsettlement, but towards the settlement of men's minds on the subject.

No one can be more conscious than I am of the very partial character of the treatment of this great subject which I have attempted. It was quite out of my power to write a book about it; but it appeared to me that something might be said within the compass of a moderately-sized pamphlet, which might awaken and stimulate discussion and at the same time shed some light on the principles involved. I am sure that many will be disappointed at the absence of detailed criticism on the passages in controversy, and of a fuller treatment of the difficulties which beset the question. I can only plead that I have done the best in my power within the limits which I was compelled to observe; whether that 'best was worth doing the wise public will judge.

I have endeavoured to gather the main features of the doctrine of annihilation from a comparison of a large number of the books and the pamphlets of those who

advocate it. At the same time the process has not been without its difficulties. There is no formulated creed of the party, and each writer has his own special views on many minor, and occasionally on some cardinal, points. I am quite prepared to find myself blamed by one and another for not including these specialties in my abstracts of doctrine. But I have tried honestly to set forth the views which pervade and give character to the literature of the school; and as I have always been very careful to state the precise form of the doctrines which I assail, those who hold them in a modified form are not aimed at in my remarks.

I have stated in a strong form the degraded view of man's estate by nature, with which, it seems to me, this literature is everywhere charged. I am quite prepared to be told by various writers that they entertain quite loftier conceptions of man's nature. But when page after page is spent in proving that the soul of man and the soul of the beast are spoken of in the same terms in the Old Testament Scripture, when every passage which speaks of man's feebleness and mortality, which describes him as 'dust,' or which is in tune with the lamentation of the weak and vain Hezekiah, is placed in the forefront of the argument, while the passages which present the nobler view find no recognition, these writers must not be sur-

prised if they are credited with the fair conclusions of their arguments, and if their system appears to be 'a doctrine of degradation' to those who believe in man's immortality.

On one point I owe a word of explanation to my friend, the Rev. S. Minton, who has complained, though in most kindly and considerate terms, as all who know him would take for granted, that I have not noted the views which he and others entertain, as to the possibility of future offers of mercy to those who in this life have never had the opportunity of hearing the Gospel. I gladly record this important modification of the doctrine which I have felt myself constrained to characterise in strong terms in these Lectures. I was not unaware of the fact that, here and there in the writings of the party, passages might be found which appear to open this larger hope. But I must add, in justice to myself, that there is no hint of it in the long and able address in which for two hours Mr. Minton expounded his views, in June last, to a large public meeting held in Chelsea Vestry Hall for the purpose of their exposition, and at which the Rev. Edward White occupied the chair. I cannot therefore take blame to myself for not having dealt with it as an important feature of the doctrine of the party. May the number of those who think with Mr. Minton be speedily multiplied!

I have received a very large number of books, pamphlets, and communications of all sorts, during the delivery of these Lectures. They are quite too numerous for me to acknowledge and answer individually. May I take the opportunity of begging those who sent them to accept my very hearty thanks.

J. Baldwin Brown.

Kent Villa,
Brixton Hill, April 1875.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS 1

The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.—Luke ix. 56.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT . 22

His mercy is everlasting.—Psalm c. 5.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF ANNIHILATION IN THE LIGHT OF MAN'S NATURE, EXPERIENCE, AND HISTORY 52

He is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him.—Luke xx. 38.

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF ANNIHILATION IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S CHARACTER AND METHODS IN THE GOVERNMENT OF MANKIND 80

God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.—John iii. 17.

V. THE GOSPEL OF LOVE 106

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.—1 John iii. 8.

THE

DOCTRINE OF ANNIHILATION

IN THE LIGHT OF

THE GOSPEL OF LOVE.

I.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS.

The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.
Luke ix. 56.

It would be difficult for me to give full expression to the sense which I entertain, of the gravity of the subject on which I have undertaken to address you. The question of the destiny of the impenitent, when they pass beyond the veil of death, is being, and is likely to be, increasingly pressed upon the thoughtful consideration of those who care to think about their creed in the Christian Church, both by the character and the tendency of the intellectual activity of our times, whose atmosphere we breathe, and whose influences we take in at every pore, and by the ideas which have become dominant in the constitution and the development of modern society. The doctrine of the eternal torment of those who die in sin is the point

on which the mediæval theology is most visibly and hopelessly breaking down. For it has now, blessed be God, become simply incredible to all who care to exercise their minds and their hearts—which are equally needed—about Divine things, that the God who has given to us the measure of His love to the world on Calvary, can bring into existence, generation after generation, countless myriads of free intelligent beings, capable of enduring the intensest suffering, with the clear certainty that the vast mass of them must spend an undying existence in fearful anguish; for want of saving faith in a Gospel which few of them were permitted to listen to, and which still fewer of them had a chance of hearing, as Christ would have proclaimed it, in the full power of its love and of its truth.

The Calvinistic theology, which inherits from the Augustinian, with a most momentous difference which I shall have to indicate, hangs together very firmly. But it is breaking down at every point save one, its grand central affirmation, which was the strength in which its disciples fought and won the battle of liberty in England, and largely in Europe, during the last three centuries, and by which it strikes its root very deeply into the truth of God. But this dogma, which I have undertaken to consider in this brief series of discourses, stands forth with peculiar prominence, inasmuch as it involves consequences of tremendous moment to the character and the government of God on the one hand, and to the destiny of the great mass of mankind on the other.

Both the heart and the intellect of the Christian Church have been educated, to an extent of which they have been little conscious, during the past generation, by that rationalism which they so expressively mistrust, and that spirit of scientific enquiry which they so insanely dread. And it now seems clear, at least to the thoughtful in the Christian community, whom the thoughtless follow in time, that the Church may no longer dare to present in the forefront of its Gospel, the vision of the great mass of mankind, the men and the women for whom Christ died, and whom on Calvary He gathered to His heart, passing out after a sad, struggling, sobbing life, into a great waste of eternal darkness, where '*weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth*' burden the shuddering air for ever and for ever. The Church has for ages kept this vision studiously before the eyes of men, as a powerful means of impressing and terrifying the ungodly, and of driving them by fear to seek safety within the only fold. But the time has come when it must be closed; it is too horrible; it presents the God of Mercy as a fierce, hard tyrant; and it buries behind a murky cloud the radiance of that love which trod with weary, bleeding feet the path to Calvary, and there by one mighty, living sacrifice, made Life triumphant over Death for ever, destroyed the works of the devil, and abolished his accursed reign.

The old doctrine of our stern theology has long been doomed; but during the last few years, through the flood of rational light which has been poured upon our theo-

logical systems, the decay of belief in it has been remarkably rapid. I am, I confess, amazed at the rapidity with which the ideas of the thoughtful in our churches on this great subject have been modified, if modified is the right word to employ. It rather seems to me as if our people, the young especially, had been cut adrift from their old moorings, and were floating hither and thither aimlessly on the currents, in no small danger of making shipwreck of faith, and of becoming an easy prey to indifferentism or despair. Two theories of extrication from a position which has become intolerable, present themselves, and are challenging the attention of the faithful, which, for the sake of brevity and distinctness, we must call Annihilationism and Universalism; though 'ism' is a termination much to be dreaded by all who seek to know the truth in Him who is the Truth, whereby the soul is made strong and free.

I know that there are those whose opinion would justly carry the greatest weight, who believe that, before many years have passed by, the whole body of Evangelical believers will be either Annihilationists or Universalists. I do not share the opinion—I am neither an Annihilationist nor a Universalist, nor do I think that I can ever become either the one or the other. I do not think that the materials are within our reach to formulate a dogmatic belief about 'the last things.' The Annihilationist seems to me to depreciate miserably man's constitution and experience on the one hand, and God's character and

methods of government on the other; while the Universalist seems to me to tamper perilously with the freedom of man's will and his moral control over his own destiny. I believe that a just view may be taken of the future development of the universe of spiritual being, which coincides with neither the one theory nor the other. It may be lamentably wanting, in the judgment of many, in the elements of dogmatic clearness and certainty; but it may yet express the clearest vision of these unutterable mysteries to which it is possible for us to attain under the present conditions of our existence, while it places us spiritually in a healthy upright attitude before the problem, and prepares us for the full solution of it, when we 'see face to face, and know as even also we are known,' beyond the veil of death. This I shall endeavour in the last lecture to develop, more in the form of suggestions as to the direction in which our thought may most profitably exercise itself with regard to these mysteries, than in the form of definite dogmatic results, about which all schools seem to me too sure.

I have not been eager to undertake this discussion; in truth, I have rather shrunk from it. It has been my lot to face much misconception, and some little obloquy, in the earlier days of my ministry, through the necessity which seemed to be laid upon me to utter what I believed to be the truth, about some of the most vital articles of the Christian faith, and especially as to the Fatherly relation of God to each human soul, and His

Fatherly government of the great human world. The present argument is but a further development of the ideas which seem to me to be involved in the Fatherhood of God. But I have no love for the thorny paths of controversy, though I have been compelled to tread them. I would gladly avoid them if possible. And in this instance I am conscious of very limited and imperfect vision in what seems to me a very obscure region of knowledge. Others speak with a confidence which, the more I study the subject, the more forsakes me, as to the exact meaning and bearing of passages of Scripture, and as to the harmony of apparently conflicting statements, upon the subject of the destiny of those who die impenitent, in eternity. This sense of the limitation of our knowledge of these unspeakable mysteries, would be far more perplexing and burdensome to me than I find it, but that one object shines out most clearly through the gloom. We see Jesus; we see the Lord who died on Calvary reigning on the great High Throne, and wielding that power which He won by His passion to subdue all things under the sceptre of His all-enduring, all-sacrificing love. That vision, and blessed be God for the clearness with which it is unveiled, must mean blessing, boundless blessing, to the great Universe of being—blessing which shall justify love's infinite sacrifice, and life's tremendous discipline, to that Universe through eternity.

The considerations to which I have just adverted, and others which I need not specify, would have led me to

abstain from any formal discussion of this subject at this moment, but that the time seems to me to have come when one cannot be silent, without abdicating one of the most sacred of the functions which a congregation has a right to expect its pastor and teacher to discharge. There is no question here about the wisdom of unsettling men's minds upon matters of belief; the unsettling seems to be complete. What is needed is some effort to settle them again on a broader, firmer, and more Christian basis, than that from which they have been driven by the impalpable but irresistible pressure of 'the light.' The belief upon these subjects which was possible, after a fashion, a generation ago, is possible no longer; and the question which is being considered by the thoughtful, of all theological parties, and in all sections of the Church, is, how is the Scripture testimony on these themes to be truly read? This is not a matter on which a Christian teacher can be honestly silent. Necessity seems to be laid upon me; therefore I speak.

And it does appear to me most important, just now, that earnest thinkers on these themes should be warned against narrow and partial solutions of these great problems, which at first sight seem attractive from their apparent completeness, and their accordance with a class of selected passages from the word of God. Nor am I deterred by the fact that I am myself without dogmatic conclusions to offer to you. It may prove, on closer consideration, that in our present state the faculty for a full

apprehension of the truth is wanting, and that the materials upon which we might be tempted to dogmatise are therefore wisely withheld. We can see but in part, and can prophesy but in part, about these great mysteries; it is possible that those who come to you with the confession that their vision is very limited and their prophecy very partial, may be more able than more assured and confident teachers to guide you towards the perfect and everlasting truth.

I have called the doctrine of annihilation a miserable doctrine. So it seems to me, and so I must characterise it. But I beg you not to imagine that I see anything weak or timid in the men who hold and proclaim it. Many of them are my personal friends, and I hold both their intelligence and their courage in honour. I can only account to myself for the satisfaction with which they seem to rest in this doctrine, by the necessity of finding some rational escape from a theological position which had become intolerable, in a doctrine which would clear the Divine Government of a terrible cloud which overshadowed it, on the one hand, while it provided some effectual terrors wherewith to overawe the wanton and the dissolute, who might otherwise seem to be encouraged in sin, on the other. It appears to me that they have left a stain upon the Divine Government well nigh as dark as that which they have attempted to remove; and I think that they take a dreary view of the function and virtue of terror in relation to the higher life and development of mankind.

Thus much by way of preface. I now proceed to offer some preliminary considerations which may serve to clear the way for the candid appreciation of the statements and arguments which I propose to submit to you.

And first, let me say an earnest word to those who cling tenaciously to the ancient belief, which seems to them to be consecrated by the faith of ages, and which they take for granted, without much thoughtful study of the matter for themselves, is the doctrine of the word of God. To cast a shadow of doubt on the orthodox creed which has been handed down from generation to generation in the Calvinistic schools of Christian thought, that the Creator and Ruler of men has chosen, by His sovereign will, to elect a limited number of our race to eternal life, to make them by His grace holy, just, and happy through eternity, while the great multitude of mankind, by the same sovereign will, are left—I will not open a great theological controversy by saying doomed[1]—to bear the penalties of sin in the shape of eternal torments—I say, to cast a doubt on the truth of this orthodox belief is with many whom these words will reach, equivalent to denying the truth of the Gospel, and handing over the Ark of God to the hands of His foes. I would that my words were strong enough to induce all such to believe that such a Gospel of the God, who *is* Love, has become incredible.

[1] I have always felt that there was no honest answer to Calvin's remark, 'Many so present election as to deny that any is reprobated, but very ignorantly and childishly, since election itself would not stand unless opposed to reprobation.'—*Inst.*. III. 23, i.

Men in these days, and still more in the future days, never can believe it. How it was ever possible that men should believe it, I hope to explain in some measure in my next discourse. But it is possible no longer, except to those who live in the world of their own theological dreams. To persist in preaching it, and to insist that your teachers shall preach it, is to drive the great world to which you preach it into open infidelity. How far the world has been already driven into infidelity by the preaching of such a Gospel, look round and see.

The attitude of science with relation to religion, which is one of the vital spiritual questions of our times, is simply at heart the inevitable protest of the honest human intellect, fairly awake and energetic, against a narrow, selfish, exclusive, and therefore wholly incredible theology. The ideas of the character and methods of the Creator and Ruler of all these worlds, which our theology has proclaimed, have been found impossible of belief in the light of free intelligence and human sympathy and charity. The result has been a strong current of thought and feeling against religion in any form, as a narrowing and blinding doctrine, tending to put a veil between a man's eyes and the truth. So long as we persist in fighting for and promulgating incredible dogmas, so long will this antagonism to religion in any shape widen and deepen. When you Christian people, who love the truth and are ready to make large sacrifices to make known the truth and to forward its work, give to your fellow-men a Gospel

which is in fair harmony with the immutable convictions of man's conscience, and the ineradicable instincts of his heart, you will witness the revival for which you pine and pray. For man was made to believe; he longs, he pants, to believe; but age after age he is driven into Atheism by the falsehoods which are promulgated in the name of the God of truth, and the cruel wrong to the Creature, which is said to be perpetrated by the ordinance of the God of love.

The time has come when, if the schism between Christianity and human society is not to be made final and complete, you must consent to reconsider the judgments about Divine and human things, which have been handed down to you from ages of strife and confusion, in the light of the ideas and habits which belong to our time, and which are shaping the form of the future. You must suspend the prejudices which make it so hard for any new thoughts about Divine truth, thoughts which make for harmony and tend to progress, to obtain a fair judgment from the intellect and conscience of the Christian community. You must let the light of reason play upon Revelation and unveil its meanings, and you must extend your sympathy instead of your distrust to all honest-hearted men, who are seeking with noble and godly effort to find the true harmony of the written word with the laws of man's nature, with the constitution of society, with the order of Creation, and with the testimony of history. You must cease to dishearten and to depress them by your doubts and inuendoes, as if they were

enemies of the truth of Christ's Gospel, for which God knows that they would willingly die; and you must sustain, strengthen, and cheer them by your sympathy, your help, your prayers, in their endeavours to explore, that they may expound, the truth. I wish that I could convey to you the intensity of my belief that it depends largely on the moral attitude of the 'orthodox' believers towards such enquiries as these and towards the enquirers, whether any honest belief in the great Christian verities remains possible for those, whether cultivated or uncultivated, in this generation, who are not themselves independent students of the word of God; or whether we must pass through an age of Atheism, and that dark, moral chaos which inevitably issues from it, before we, or rather let us say before our children, come forth to that broad, firm continent of truth, righteousness, and charity which, since Christ reigns, we know *must* lie beyond.

I do not speak for myself. I have borne so much opposition and mistrust for speaking what seemed to me to be the truth in past years, that I can bear more, if it must be, with tolerable patience. I speak for my young brethren, whose work is very difficult, whose battle is very hard, harder than many of you know, in such times as these. Brethren in Christ, let me appeal to you as one who has been for a full generation in the very midst of the conflict; do not fire into the troops who are bravely fighting your battle; do not blight with your distrust the men who are struggling hard, through many errors and failures

no doubt, but still with honest and truth-loving hearts, to discover and disclose the harmonies which *must* subsist between the word of Scripture and the deepest needs, experiences, and convictions of the great world of men.

A second consideration which I submit is, that this is not a question which can be settled by the quotation of isolated texts, and for the settlement of which a formidable apparatus of critical scholarship is indispensable. There is no stumbling-block more dangerous to a Christian thinker than a text torn from its surroundings. The formidable array of words of doubtful, or, rather, manifold meaning, on the nice interpretation of which the knowledge of the truth of this matter is supposed to depend, we can easily imagine may lead an unlearned, simple-minded Christian to torment himself with the question, How is it possible that I can ever attain in my unlearned estate to an intelligent belief upon the subject? Take it for granted that a large question like this does not depend for its intelligent settlement upon niceties of expression which can be appreciated only by cultivated critics. Be sure that the truth of a matter of such tremendous importance to man depends on principles of the broadest and firmest character, the nature and bearings of which can be fairly apprehended by all who bring an honest and open mind to the enquiry. I have little patience, I confess, with the wranglings of many who vainly conceive themselves to be critical scholars, as to the precise shade of meaning which a word may be supposed to bear in a

particular passage of St. Paul. It is a fair question for scholars, and it has the greatest interest to scholars; and the settlement of such a point by careful and sound scholarship is a matter of importance to theological truth But you may almost count the men in England whose authoritative judgment on such a matter is worth anything at all. And be sure that this is too large a question for great critical scholars to settle for us. The meaning of the word, the whole witness of the Bible, must be brought to expound the difficult and apparently conflicting statements which seem to bear on the particular issue. It is a question for a sound Christian philosophy, based on the whole Revelation, rather than for nice textual criticism; it is a matter, therefore, which the average intellect and conscience of Christian men may feel themselves competent to discuss and to decide, on the evidence furnished by the broader statements of Revelation, as to the nature of man, the meaning of life, and the character and purposes of God.

I have heard men entering into an elaborate argument to prove that the great mass of their fellow-men must spend eternity in miserable torment, on the basis of the exact shade of meaning with which a Greek word—of the mere pronunciation of which they were dismally ignorant—is employed in a particular passage; and I have not wondered, as I listened, that the world has been content to leave the critics and the word-mongers among the theologians, to carry on their controversies at their

leisure, utterly careless of them and their gospel of strife. Criticism, which, to be worth anything, must be the work of the finest and most cultivated intellects—the small critics are like the plague of flies—may bind and cement firmly the great stones of the temple of theological truth. But the body of the structure must be of the homeliest and most substantial stuff, material that common and unlearned men can hew and build in. It is wonderful how every great Christian belief has grown to its full form and power, not by the toil of scholars within closets, but by the instincts, the needs, the toils, the struggles, and the manifold experiences of simple Christian men and women, fighting by God's help the battle and bearing the burden of the Christian life.

I have written during my thirty years' ministry a good many theological books. If there is one thing in connection with them which I recall with a special thankfulness, it is that I have never treated great theological subjects as though they depended mainly on considerations which none but accomplished scholars could appreciate. I have always been sure that God does not leave matters of the largest moment hanging on the exact meaning of obscure and difficult words; and while accepting thankfully the judgment of the critics on matters which it lies within the province of consummate scholarship to determine, I have ever sought to lay on a broader and deeper basis than mere textual criticism my arguments on the larger theological truths. I shall adopt the same method now.

You will hear little about Greek words and particles, and little about particular texts; while I shall have much to say about the larger meaning and bearing of Revelation in the whole body of Scripture, and of the light in which it places man's nature, his life, his burdens, responsibilities, and destinies on the one hand, and the mind and the methods of God on the other.

It is deeply important, too, that we should understand how perfectly free, frank, and informal are the utterances of the Bible on all the great subjects of Christian thought. Whatever the Bible may be, it is never 'doctrinaire.' It is nowhere a book of propositions and definitions, or a book from which propositions and definitions can be readily extracted. It is a book of life for the living, and not a book of thought for the philosophers. Its use of language is that of conversation rather than of science; and it needs for its study that honest intuitive intelligence with which we gather the mind of a man from his frank conversation, rather than the keen critical acumen with which we look into a scientific treatise or a dogmatic creed. It is not in the least afraid of contradicting itself in terms in the same chapter, and it is full of discords of expression, which an honest mind can at once harmonise. There is hardly any position which texts may not be found, as far as the mere letter is concerned, to sustain. How many stumbling-blocks it leaves in the way of faith which would be removed by a word of explanation; how many passages it offers for errors and heresies to build upon, which we are

tempted to think a little judicious oversight would have expunged. This, its freedom, its simplicity, its frankness, its naturalness, is its glory; but it makes the building-up of monstrous doctrines comparatively easy to the text-mongers, and necessitates for their confutation a broad and spiritual survey of its whole field of truth. And further, on themes which are unspeakable in their fulness, like this, the Bible deals with us much as we deal with children, and presents to us images which do not profess to be in formal correspondence with the unseen realities, but such as may draw out our latent intelligence to discern the truth with increasing clearness, and to grasp the whole substance of it bodily at last.

Much of the intellectual basis of the theory of human destinies which I am opposing, seems to me to consist of what I cannot but call an idolatry of the *words* of the Bible as distinguished from its *word*; that is, the determination to fix certain finely-drawn shades of meaning to words and phrases in particular passages of the Scriptures, and to make them the basis of doctrine, when it is manifest to those who take a larger view of inspiration, that those words and phrases are used freely, and are to be interpreted in the harmony of the whole deliverance of the Bible on the themes of which they treat. When our Lord said that His apostles should sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, we arrive at what He meant by not adhering too literally to what He said. Paul, accusing himself as the chief of sinners, could easily

be convicted of mock humility or hypocrisy by those who insisted on a precise interpretation of the apostle's words. You must judge the words by the word of his whole life and writings, and you will arrive at a sustaining and stimulating truth. Emphatically are those passages in which our Lord speaks of His own nature and claim to the obedience of mankind, subject to this law of interpretation; neglecting to observe it, we should arrive at strange and startling results.

The Bible, too, may be found, as any wise man may sometimes be found, when he is speaking freely and earnestly, and with a view to impress and stir up his fellow-men, treating of great themes in terms which seem logically inconsistent or oppugnant. There are passages in the Bible on all the great subjects of Christian thought which seem to look one way, and other passages which seem to look another, according to the state of thought and feeling out of which they were spoken, or to which they were addressed. Interpret them with rigid logical accuracy, bring the half-closed critical eye to bear upon them, and it would be easy to convict the Bible of startling inconsistencies; bring the open eye to bear upon them, the eye that seeks the light, light to live by, and the very varieties and contradictions disclose a larger and fairer world of truth.

The last preliminary consideration which I offer, concerns the influence of terror on the spiritual condition and development of mankind. There are many kinds of

fear and many fruits of fear. There is a fear which is purifying and ennobling; the fear of a child lest he should grieve a parent, of a friend lest he should wound a friend. There is a fear which has more of awe than of love in it; this fear made Israel tremble, though with no debasing terror, when they stood before the splendours and the wonders of Sinai, and it prepared them to hear the Divine commandment and live. It is the fear of God which the Saviour teaches His disciples to blend with the trust and love which His mission inspires. Again, there is a fear which is mainly slavish, the fear of pain, or of the loss of pleasure, the dread of torment, of the lash and the chain. I do not say that when men are sunk utterly in slavish bondage to sin, dull of ear, dead of heart, to all the higher influences that can appeal to spirits, its ministry as a rough apparitor to the careless, thriftless conscience, can be wholly dispensed with. But I do say that the trust of Christendom in the terror of hell through all these ages has been faithless and degrading, and has had a chief share in producing that dreary indifference to the claims of Christ and of His Gospel, that blindness to the realities of the higher world, which after eighteen centuries of Christian teaching and influence the Church has so bitterly to deplore.

There are multitudes who cling to the terror of the mediæval doctrine, because they think that they may not dare let go an instrument of incomparable power, in their judgment, to arrest the sinner, as they call it, and drive

him into the fold. 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me,' said the Saviour, as He entered on His Passion. Ah! Lord, we are legalists and terrorists still; still we slight the sacrifice, still we distrust the love. But we have had hell paraded in its full dress of horrors in Christendom for ages. The flesh creeps, the very marrow shivers in the bones, before the ghastly pictures of anguish, of tortured, maddened, hopeless souls, in which poets, painters, and preachers have revelled; flashing the flames of hell in the face of the sinner to terrify him and drive him to God. Look round at the result. Look at our intellectual class; look at our artisan class; look at our peasant class; and ask yourselves, Christian men and women, is it not time to begin to think about 'a more excellent way?' Can anything be sadder than the condition in which Christendom is stranded after all these ages, in which the pit has been trusted as a mightier instrument of conversion than the tale of Calvary, the flames of hell than the Redeemer's tears and blood?

Shake yourselves free, I beseech you, from this clinging to the terror of judgment; that was not 'the terror of the Lord' which moved St. Paul to persuade men. The sighing and the moaning of souls in anguish, is not the power of God unto the salvation of those who are perishing in sin. Make free way for the Gospel of the Love, I beseech you; the Love in all that awful holy power which the sacrifice of Calvary unveils. Let it have free course, as it has never yet had free course in

Christendom, and see how swiftly the joyful power will burst forth for the conquest of the world. Let us preach in all the fulness of His redeeming mercy, 'Christ Jesus, and Him crucified;' who came, and lived, and died, 'not to destroy men's lives, but to save them;' and who is, and must be, the power of God unto salvation to every soul that is saved in the wide Universe, now, and through eternity. 'To whom be glory and majesty, dominion and power, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.'

II.

THE DOCTRINE OF EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT.

His mercy is everlasting.—*Psalm* c. 5.

THE tenacity with which the Church has clung to the doctrine of the everlasting punishment of the wicked, and the submission with which the Christian world has accepted it, bear a very solemn and impressive testimony to the power which the 'conscience of sins' wields over the experiences, the beliefs, and the previsions of mankind. Without this dread reality in man's consciousness to rest upon, this awful dogma could never have reached the place which it has occupied in the system of Christian thought. No sick dreams of a morbid imagination, no bugbear dressed up and held forth in the interest of a priesthood, could have sustained this tremendous belief though all these Christian ages, and given to it a hold which it is hard to shake over multitudes of the most loving, compassionate, and yearning Christian hearts. Nothing but an overwhelming sense of the reality and the misery of sin, reaching to the roots of the being and mingled with all its experiences, could make it for a moment credible to man, that the sin of a little span of a fleeting

life which is born with the taint of corruption, could draw on itself the sentence of unutterable torment through never-ending ages, under the judgment of a God who blends infinite tenderness with absolute righteousness in every decree.

It is the inward anguish which makes the outward sentence in any wise credible. Sin, despite the softening pleas and the mitigating suggestions of the philosopher, remains the chronic agony of man and of the world. That sense of guilt must needs have hold on man in the innermost core of his being, which wrings from his agonised heart the cry, 'Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' and which leads him in all countries and in all ages, in various ways, to offer up that which is dearer to him than dear life, that a righteousness higher than his own may receive what he dreams will be a satisfaction, and that the awful barrier which guilt raises between his soul and God, may be cast down and for ever destroyed. No dream, sick or sound, brought that idea of sacrifice into man's imagination; no terror wielded by a priest can explain one tithe of the moral dread and anguish of mankind.

Christianity did not put that sense of miserable sin and shameful guilt into man's spirit; Christianity found it there, and proclaimed the sacrifice wherein the Divine Love offered a Divine Life on Calvary, as the propitiation for man's guilt, because nothing but an atonement

offered by God, and therefore sufficient before God, can furnish the basis of a vital reconciliation between Himself and the guilty transgressor, in view of the deeper experiences of life and eternity. Man, when agonising under the sense of sin, is ready to believe any dark truth about the issue of sin, for he feels the worm already gnawing, and the fire already scorching and blasting within. But man's estimate of his desert, or even his real desert, is not the measure or the rule of God's dispensations of mercy. Paul once felt himself 'the chief of sinners;' but if God had taken him and dealt with him as the chief of sinners, a great shadow would have fallen over the Righteousness as well as over the Love.

Belief in eternal torment becomes possible through the terrible anguish of the sin-stricken spirit; the pit which sin has opened in every guilty human heart. The sinner, in the agony of conviction, needs no worse pit than he finds within.

But the prominence of the doctrine and its ghastly surroundings, are due very largely to the deliberate and persistent policy of the Church. I mean by the Church, all Churches—the ancient Church, the mediæval Latin Church; the reformed Churches, and the modern Roman, or, as we must now call it, the Papal Church. When I use the word policy, I do not employ it in a sinister sense. I believe that the policy has been mainly honest, however mistaken, though to a terrible extent it has been made to replenish the coffers of selfish and grasping priests.

But all Churches have put their trust largely in terror; I believe that I may say with entire truth, that in Christendom, through all the Christian ages, the terror, as an instrument of Christian influence, has quite eclipsed the love. I do not address myself in these discourses to theological experts. I adopt nothing of the scholastic tone. The subject has been stifled by the cloud of words and the dust of word-chopping, which critics, great and small, have raised around it. I shall deal, as far as possible, with considerations which quite uncritical persons can appreciate. The men had little time or skill to manipulate subtle and recondite meanings, who heard the words of Christ or read the Epistles of St. Paul. One broad simple proof that terror rather than love has been supreme in Europe in the conception of Christ's relation to the world, that the office of the Judge has obscured the mission of the Saviour, is to be found in the rapid spread and the intense fervour of Mariolatry. What, looking at it in a broad way, does the worship of the Virgin mean? It means that the Saviour has become increasingly associated with ideas of judgment, not of compassion; and so men devisé and set forth a woman as a mediator with Jesus, that they may re-open through a woman those springs of tenderness which, but for the woman, they think would be well-nigh closed in the merciful Redeemer's heart!

The Church, then, has adopted the policy of terror. Her hierarchy, her ordained ministers, have made it their

business to let men hear the swish of the lash and the clank of the chain. But they have not invented the idea, they have not devised the doctrine and foisted it into the Scriptures and the creed of the Church. No; the early and mediæval theologians believed that they found it in the Bible, and well might believe that they found it there, if they were content to dwell on one passage, or one class of passages, and to explain other passages and classes of passages summarily away. Those acquainted at all with early Church literature will know how absolutely decisive the passage, 'and these shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into life eternal,' seemed to the vast majority of the writers of those times. St. Augustine, who had about as clear an intellect, and as keen an insight into words, as has ever been granted to man, speaks on this passage with unhesitating certainty. He affirms that the two clauses must be interpreted in the same sense, that if the bliss is everlasting so must the torment be. And he is the mouthpiece here of the Church of his time, and of the whole mediæval period through which, with more or less of supremacy, his intellect ruled. I have read many ingenious arguments to prove that punishment here means annihilation, and that everlasting is therefore a rhetorical superfluity; and I have read them with the conviction that it is possible for very clever gentlemen to do almost anything with words, provided they may pick out of several senses in which a word is used, that which suits their theology, and may insist that this is the mean-

ing which must be put upon it in the particular passage under discussion, the whole drift of which may set quite the other way.

But there is another class of passages which meet us in both Testaments, which seem to preach a widely different doctrine. The texts in the Old Testament which declare that God's mercy is everlasting, that He will not keep His anger for ever, that He loves with an everlasting love a people as full of follies, of sins, of idolatries, as any people known to history, are numerous and emphatic. Again, the passage in the New Testament (Matt. xii. 31–2)[1] about a sin never being forgiven either in this world or in the world that is to come, seems to lose all but an unworthy rhetorical meaning, if forgiveness is a thing

[1] I quote this passage with hesitation, as the meaning which the word translated 'world' is meant to bear is exceedingly doubtful; but the argument is valid against those who hold that 'the world to come' is the eternal state, and who deny the possibility of forgiveness after death. Neither Mark nor Luke convey this precise idea in their version of the saying; and the language in Mark is, perhaps, suggestive of some modification of the absoluteness of the sentence as recorded by Matthew. May not the words of Christ, 'With God all things are possible,' with relation to a kindred difficulty (Matt. xix. 24–6), suggest the principle on which we may stop short of a hopeless interpretation of these terrible warning words? The language of our Lord about Judas, 'Good were it for that man if he had never been born,' is often regarded as decisive of the endless as well as the terrible character of the punishment to which he doomed himself. But nothing can be more unsafe than to draw doctrinal conclusions from vivid and intense descriptions like this, of what was meant to be regarded as a matchless misery; while the fact that our Saviour uses this terrible language of this unique crime, seems to forbid our application of it, as it is applied by annihilationist as well as orthodox theologians, to the future condition of a great multitude of our race.

quite beyond possibility in that 'world which is to come.' Again, the question which is raised in another remarkable passage about punishment with few stripes or with many stripes (Luke xii. 47–8) seems an utterly idle one to a soul condemned to an eternity of suffering. The utter hopelessness of the lot is the horror; what is a stripe more or less to a soul shut out from light, from life, from love, from God, for ever. Again, there is a passage which seems precisely as clear, as explicit as that on the 'eternal punishment' and the 'life eternal,' spoken by Christ in the most solemn moment of His life, when He was entering the cloud of the last agony, '*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.*' (John xii. 32.) Words can hardly seem plainer, and certainly could not be spoken under more awful obligations to plainness; but, again, clever critics take them and manipulate them, and explain to us that they mean something quite different from what they appear to express. I am not attempting to construct a harmony here. I shall have something to say about the relations of such passages in future lectures; that is, as far as I see light about them. But here are clearly two classes of passages; and my present concern is to beg you to note that the Church has through these eighteen centuries elected to stand by the one and not by the other, as the true key to the doctrine of our Lord. She has chosen the passage in Matthew xxv., which it is manifest, from the points on which the judgment hinges, is limited in its scope, as the central passage on which the

doctrine turns; and all passages which appeared to contain conflicting doctrine have been forced into harmony with it. And she has adopted into her system the whole horror of the suggestion of verse 41. 'The everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;' she has accepted to the full the hints rather than the descriptions of torment, wherewith the Scriptures, in their graphic, homely way, clothe and present a terrible spiritual fact; and the literature of the Church has been charged with horrors from the first days of the hierarchical order of things until now. And why? Because she felt it supremely important to have the means of successfully terrifying men. That she felt it honestly in the main there can be no question; though, as I have said, the doctrine has been awfully prostituted to make a thriving trade for priests.

I have no intention of discussing the patristic doctrine of torment. I might cull terrible and harrowing pictures enough from writers of the first eminence, to prove how from the first the torments of hell have been elaborately set forth before the eyes of Christendom as an essential doctrine of Christianity, and the name of the God of Love has been thereby systematically blasphemed. Think, I beseech you, what kind of Christianity Christendom has lived through; and while you wonder at its vitality, wonder not that it is still 'as a voice crying in the wilderness' to a heedless and scoffing world. One passage I must quote from Augustine, setting forth the nobler

view which the smoke of the pit has been suffered to eclipse. In a remarkable treatise he says: 'To perish from the kingdom of God, to be an exile from the city of God, to be an alien from the life of God; to want "so great multitude of God's sweetness which He hath laid up for them that fear Him, and hath wrought for them that hope in Him," is so great a punishment, that no torment that we know can be compared to it, if it be eternal, and they continue through how many ages soever. There will therefore continue without end that eternal death of the damned, that is, alienation from the life of God; and itself will be common to all, whatever men according to their human feelings may imagine concerning variety of human punishment, or concerning relief or intermission of pain;[1] as the eternal life of the saints will remain in common the life of all, in whatever distinction of honour they may harmoniously shine.' 'Enchiridion,' c. 112.

But nothing short of horrible physical torture would serve the purpose of the Church for the terrifying of men, and so visions and pictures of agonising torments abound. Literature and art alike groan with horrors throughout the Middle Age, relieved, however, somewhat by a grotesque humour, which seems to suggest that writers and painters had some thoughts in the background as to the reality of the loathsome scenes which they pourtrayed. Bæda

[1] He had spoken above of the possibility that the pains of the damned might at certain intervals of time be in some measure mitigated, since God did not altogether 'shut up His tender mercy."

gives us two very remarkable narratives, on which I dwell for a moment, inasmuch as they strike the key-note of much of the mediæval thought upon the subject. Not that they by any means open the train of thought and representation; we should have to go much further back than Bæda, and to dig deeply into the underlying stratum of heathen beliefs and traditions, for the *fons et origo malorum*; but these visions which Bæda records take up the key-note clearly, and prelude the great mediæval poem, the 'Divina Commedia,' in which this dark and sad theology—dark and sad as the times—culminated, and from which we must date the first stirrings of the Reformation.

One passage describes the vision of the blessed Abbot Fursey; which those who care to read it will find in b. iii., ch. 19 of the 'Ecclesiastical History.' I do not quote it here, as it is less striking than that of one Drithelm, who was said to have risen from the dead, and who, unlike another in similar dread relation,

> Who told it not; or something seal'd
> The lips of that Evangelist,

gave a most particular and terrible account of what he beheld. The vision is remarkable because it presents thus early, in the seventh century, though in rude coarse form, the outline which is filled in with such terrible power in the visions of the 'Inferno'; where horror is piled on horror in the pictures of the torments of the wicked;

where popes and princes writhe in intolerable anguish in forms which it would task the most weird imagination of the painter to pourtray, and where

Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate,

is written over the gate of hell. The vision is as follows:—

'Thus he related what he had seen: "He that led me had a shining countenance and a bright garment, and we went on silently, as I thought, towards the north-east. Walking on, we came to a vale of great breadth and depth, but of infinite length; on the left it appeared full of dreadful flames; the other side was no less horrid, for violent hail and cold snow were flying in all directions; both places were full of men's souls, which seemed by turns to be tossed from one side to the other, as it were by a violent storm; for when the wretches could no longer endure the excess of heat, they leaped into the middle of the cutting cold; and finding no rest there, they leaped back again into the middle of the unquenchable flames. Now whereas an innumerable multitude of deformed spirits were thus alternately tormented far and near, as far as could be seen, without any intermission, I began to think that this perhaps might be hell, of whose intolerable flames I had often heard talk. My guide, who went before me, answered to my thought, saying, 'Do not believe so, for this is not the hell you imagine.'

'"When he had conducted me, much frightened with that horrid spectacle, by degrees, to the further end, on a

sudden I saw the place begin to grow dusk and filled with darkness. When I came into it, the darkness, by degrees, grew so thick that I could see nothing besides it and the shape and garment of him that led me. As we went on through the shades of night, on a sudden there appeared before us frequent globes of black flames, rising as it were out of a great pit, and falling back again into the same. When I had been conducted thither, my leader suddenly vanished, and left me alone in the midst of darkness and this horrid vision, whilst those same globes of fire, without intermission, at one time flew up and at another fell back into the bottom of the abyss; and I observed that all the flames, as they ascended, were full of human souls, which, like sparks flying up with smoke, were sometimes thrown on high, and again, when the vapour of the fire ceased, dropped down into the depth below. Moreover, an insufferable stench came forth with the vapours and filled all those dark places.

'"Having stood there a long time in much dread, not knowing what to do, which way to turn, or what end I might expect, on a sudden I heard behind me the noise of a most hideous and wretched lamentation, and at the same time a loud laughing, as of a rude multitude insulting captured enemies. When that noise, growing plainer, came up to me, I observed a gang of evil spirits dragging the howling and lamenting souls of men into the midst of the darkness, whilst they themselves laughed and rejoiced. Among those men, as I could discern, there was one shorn

like a clergyman, a layman, and a woman. The evil spirits that dragged them went down into the midst of the burning pit; and as they went down deeper, I could no longer distinguish between the lamentation of the men and the laughing of the devils, yet I still had a confused sound in my ears. In the meantime some of the dark spirits ascended from that flaming abyss, and running forward beset me on all sides, and much perplexed me with their glaring eyes and the stinking fire which proceeded from their mouths and nostrils; and threatened to lay hold on me with burning tongs, which they had in their hands, yet they durst not touch me, though they frightened me. Being thus on all sides enclosed with enemies and darkness, and looking about on every side for assistance, there appeared behind me, on the way that I came, as it were, the brightness of a star shining amidst the darkness, which increased by degrees and came rapidly towards me. When it drew near, all those evil spirits that sought to carry me away with their tongs dispersed and fled."'—Bæda, 'Eccl. Hist.' b. v. c. 2.

But we will not linger over mediæval horrors. For a reason which I shall presently dwell upon, it is since the Reformation that the doctrine has been set forth in its most dread and ghastly aspect, with absolutely no relief to its pitiless cruelty—and all in the name and for the honour of the God who '*is* Love.'

I doubt whether in any age of theological literature the doctrine has been brought out with such ruthless

consistency as by President Edwards, from whose writings I quote some passages that we may see how the doctrine looks, divested of its sacerdotal and clothed in its Calvinistic dress. In one passage he says: 'The judge of that day will not mix mercy with justice. The time for mercy to be shewn to sinners will then be past. Christ will then appear in another character than that of a merciful Saviour. Having laid aside the inviting aspect of grace and mercy, He will clothe himself with justice and vengeance. He will not only in general exact of sinners the demand of the law, but He will exact the whole without any abatement, He will exact the very uttermost farthing. (Matt. v. 26.) Then Christ will come to fulfil that in Rev. xiv. 10: "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, into the cup of His indignation." The punishment threatened to ungodly men is without any pity (Ezek. v. 11): "Neither shall Mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity." Here all judges have a mixture of mercy, but the wrath of God will be poured out upon the wicked without mixture, and vengeance will have its full weight.'[1]

Again: 'We can conceive but little of the matter. We cannot conceive what the sinking of the soul in such a case is. But, to help your conception, imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven, all of a glowing heat, or into the midst of a glowing brick-kiln or of a great furnace

[1] Vol. iii. p. 221. Ed. New York, 1844.

where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire, as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, as full within and without as a bright coal of fire, all the while full of quick sense: what horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace! and how long would that quarter of an hour seem to you! If it were to be measured by a glass, how long would the glass seem to be running! And after you had endured it for a minute, how overbearing would it be to you to think that you had to endure it the other fourteen!

'But what would be the effect on your soul if you knew that you must lie there enduring that torment to the full for twenty-four hours! and how much greater the effect if you knew that you must endure it for a whole year! And how vastly greater still, if you knew that you must endure it for a thousand years! Oh, then, how would your heart sink, if you thought, if you knew that you must bear it for ever and ever! That there would be no end; that after millions and millions of ages your torment would be no nearer to an end than ever it was; and that you never, never should be delivered! But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.'[1]

Again, that we may see the whole ghastly shape of

[1] Vol. iii. p. 260.

the doctrine: 'The sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints for ever. It will not only make them more sensible of the greatness and freeness of the Grace of God in their happiness, but it will really make their happiness the greater, as it will make them more sensible of their own happiness; it will give them a more lively relish of it, it will make them prize it more. When they see others who were of the same nature, and born under the same circumstances, plunged in such misery, and they so distinguished, it will make them sensible how happy they are. A sense of the opposite misery in any case greatly increases the relish of any joy or pleasure.'[1] And this was once preached as a Gospel! As to the bearing of this vision of horrors on the Divine character and ways, Edwards plainly says: 'Is not God worthy to have the same right with respect to the gifts of His Grace that a man has with regard to his money or his goods? . . . God may justly show greater respect to others than to you, for you have shewn greater respect to others than to God.' 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself' might well be the Divine rebuke to such a theology.

Calvin writes to the same purpose, though in a loftier strain: 'As the Lord by the efficacy of His calling accomplishes towards His elect the salvation to which He had by His eternal counsel destined them, so He has

[1] Vol. iii. p. 276.

judgments against the reprobate, by which He executes His counsel concerning them. Those, therefore, whom He has created for dishonour during life and destruction at death, that they may be vessels of wrath and examples of severity in bringing to their doom, He at one time deprives of the means of hearing His word, at another by the preaching of it blinds and stupefies them the more.'[1]

Elsewhere he says, with a touch of human pity: 'I again ask, how is it that the fall of Adam involves so many nations with their infant children in eternal death without remedy, unless that it so seemed meet to God? The decree, I admit, is horrible.'[2] On which it is enough to say, that the time is far past when men can bring themselves to believe in a God who gives forth what His advocates are compelled to confess are horrible decrees.

The idea of terrible physical torment has lived on to our times. One of the very ablest of the theologians of the last generation, a most courageous yet gentle and meek-hearted man, in his theological lectures, points out that oceans of fire are seething beneath us which may be put to these uses; and he suggests that the bodies of the lost in the eternal state may undergo modifications of structure, so as to be susceptible of more terrible agony through the action of fire than any of which we here can dream. These pages will be read by many who can

[1] *Inst.* book iii. c. xxiv. § 12.

[2] Book iii. c. xxiii. § 7.

remember that in the days of their childhood their hands were held to scorch before the fire as a key to hell torments, and as a prelude to the preaching of the Gospel of infinite pity and love. And the extreme Anglican party in our day seem bent on reviving all the loathsome mediæval horrors. Torment is the priest's scourge, which he wields in all ages with ruthless severity: winning power for his office for the moment by murdering the truth of the Gospel, and blighting at the roots all possibility of manly faith in the generation which submits itself to his sway. But here the doctrine of priestly absolution must be taken as its pendant. The Church has become to such the idol which thrusts aside the Lord.

Now, I am not about to argue against this. It is simply incredible. No man can believe it now, no man dares preach it now, who ever ventures outside the sad, dark, and narrow world of a hard, selfish, and paralysing theology. Is there one of you who can take in and rest upon the thought that the God who, in the strength of His love, endured an infinite anguish, that He might gather His sinning, suffering, struggling children to His heart, is filled with the whole tenderness of that love towards them during the little space of their mortal existence, but that He then lights up the fires, scorches them with the keenest pain in every fibre of their being, through endless ages; blind to the pleading glances of their anguish, deaf to the piercing cries of their pain, cold to the burning reproach with which they bemoan

the curse of the existence with which He has endowed them, indifferent to the broken-hearted misery which might move the brutes, nay, the very stones, to pity, and *must* stir *a man* to help and save? Who so can believe it let him believe it; the end of such belief is the abyss of atheistic despair.

But how could man ever believe it? How could such a creed ever plant itself in the Christian world and grow? In answering this question, which naturally arises, and which is full of interest, I must study severe compression. I am not attempting to write a treatise; I rather seek to indicate lines of thought which my readers may follow for themselves, and which seem to me to lead in the direction of the truth. I offer the following suggestions as helping to explain to us how it became possible that such a belief should be entertained and cherished in Christian hearts. Remember, no man sees all round his creed. Always there is a dark side, with some there are many dark sides, which are never fairly explored. It is only when the background of the thought of the age throws these shadowy forms into strong relief, that men arouse themselves to look into them, and measure their harmonies with the truth of God. Just such an awakening is happening to the believers in these doctrines now.

1. The first key to the belief of the Church in this tremendous dogma is to be found in the inward torment of sin. The cry of the agonised spirit under conviction of sin, 'O miserable man that I am! who shall deliver

me from the body of this death?' made the idea of the outward torment in some sort credible; and as for the eternity, a man might say: 'If I am to live for ever, and this accursed flesh,' as Persius has it, 'is to cling to me; if I, with the very fibres of whose nature sin seems to be enwoven, am to live on, why sin lives with me, in me, and how can I escape from misery?' We must remember that the pressure of this sense of sin is so terrible, that a great multitude of our fellow men find their only rest in a creed which demands the annihilation or the absorption of the individual consciousness as the condition of blessedness; and then we shall not wonder that men, looking only at themselves, not having faith, and taught that they were to live for ever—crushed, too, by the sense of their own sins, their own crimes—have been ready to crouch under the terror of torment, which their priests wielded as an instrument of influence more potent than the Gospel of love.

2. Those who have cared to consider this doctrine in its larger aspects, to think about it, and to write about it, and who have explained, defended, and enforced it, as a rule have had the happy conviction that they were elect to the blessedness of heaven. Much depends on the side from which such a doctrine is contemplated, as to the composure with which it is regarded. We hear only the voice of those who contemplate it from the safe side. The cry of a sinful, suffering life, endowed with freedom, with a fatal taint in the blood, crushed by the

sense of the power of temptation, and obnoxious to the pains of eternal death, rarely becomes articulate in the literature of the Church. We hear something of the souls whom the terror has driven to the priest, nothing of the multitudes whom it has embrutalised and destroyed. So in revival movements we hear everything about those who are aroused and apparently quickened; nothing about the throngs who are distressed and saddened by the coarse excitements and the incredible theology, or who pass from scoffing into lasting indifference and despair. The writers are always on the affirmative side. There is one remarkable exception, however. The inner history of Lord Byron's life hinges on the fact that he believed himself to be in the Calvinistic sense reprobate, and in fierce frenzy he gave all diligence to make what he believed to be his calling and election to perdition sure.

3. It must be remembered that the doctrine was developed in times of fierce persecution, when Christians suffered horrible tortures at the hands of their heathen foes. They were times of torture when the doctrine rooted itself in the Christian world. The flesh shudders when we read the narrative of the exquisite torments which were inflicted, not on strong men only, but on delicate women and tender children, whose only crime, in the judgment of their tormenters, was faith in the Saviour. The Christians, as a rule, were nobly true to the spirit of their creed and the traditions of their Church, and prayed for their tyrants even in death. But the spectacle of such

agonies, and the constant peril of being called to endure them, made it easier to believe in a tremendous act of retribution, which should cover the persecutors with everlasting contempt and shame.

4. The doctrine grew to a head in times of high-handed wrong, of cruelty, tyranny, covetousness, and lust. Earthly law was trampled upon, the weak were spoiled, the poor were ground down to the dust, and no power on earth but the Church rose up to withstand the tyranny that laid waste the world. Wonder not that the Church was tempted to wield her weapons of terror with fierce determination, and to make the mockers of earthly sanctities tremble before the vision of the tortures of an everlasting hell. Then, too, men were used to cruelty; pain, even terrible pain, seemed to them the natural heritage of the human. Whole classes seemed born to suffer; there was the less to make men shudder in the thought of great masses tormented by the hand of Almighty vengeance through a long eternity. You must read more deeply than popular histories will carry you, the records of the life of Italian cities in that thirteenth century, if you would understand the inner motive of that tremendous drama of retribution which Dante's 'Inferno' unveils.

5. Those were the days of privileged classes, and orders, and races, in which an elect few seemed born to honour, power, and pleasure, while the great mass lived socially in a kind of outer darkness, as hopeless of fighting their way into the inner sacred circle, as of climbing to

another world. The stricter application of the Christian doctrine of brotherhood, the equality of all men before God, and in all essentials before each other, has compelled a reconsideration of the principle of the equality of God's ways, which the Scriptures hold so dear. The order of the Universe, which was contemplated by President Edwards with satisfaction, can be contemplated now without disgust and horror by those only who bury their souls in the crassest ignorance of the world, of man, and of God. But,

6. The most important consideration as a key to the history of this belief is this. The Church, while she wielded the terrors, held the keys. She frightened men deliberately by pictures of unutterable torments; but it was to frighten men to the Church, the Church claiming the power to shield her obedient children from the doom which she unveiled. Church penances, absolutions, unctions, and the whole apparatus of purgatory, softened the terror of the dogma immensely; men were more readily persuaded to acquiesce in the doctrine, in that its cutting edge was practically turned by the shield of the Church. I do not dwell on the tricks, the frauds, the myriad abominations of mediæval penances and indulgences. We will hear a purer witness. Augustine writes: 'Nor is it to be denied that the souls of the dead are relieved by the piety of their living friends, when for them the sacrifice of the Mediator is offered, or alms are done in the church. But these things are profitable to those who, when alive,

deserved that these things should hereafter profit them. For there is a certain manner of life, neither so good as not to stand in need of these things after death, nor yet so bad as that these things profit not after death.' (You will note that this describes the condition of the great multitude of men who would not have the faintest chance of being received into our churches, but who according to this patristic doctrine were not beyond the reach of this vicarious aid after death). '. . . . When, therefore, sacrifices, whether of the altar or of any alms whatever, are offered for all baptised persons deceased, for the very good they are givings of thanks, for the not very bad they are propitiations, for the very bad, although they be no helpers of the dead, yet they are consolations, such as they are, of the living.'—'Enchiridion,' c. 110.

And again, 'Forgiveness of sins. Ye have (this article of) the creed in you perfectly when ye receive baptism. Let none say, I have done this or that sin; perchance that is not forgiven me. What hast thou done? How great a sin hast thou done? Name any heinous sin thou hast committed—heavy, terrible, which thou shudderest to think of—have done what thou wilt; hast thou killed Christ? . . . . For the sake of all sins baptism was provided, for the sake of light sins, without which we cannot be, was prayer provided. . . . . Once for all we have washing by baptism, every day we have washing in prayer. Only do not commit those things for the sake of which ye needs must be separated from Christ's body, which be far from

you. For those whom ye have seen doing penance, have committed heinous things, either adulteries or some enormous crimes; for these they do penance. Because if these had been light sins, to blot out these daily prayer would suffice.'—'Serm. ad Catech.' 15.

You see how the doctrine was softened to the apprehension of men, through the whole Middle Age, by the sacraments and discipline of the Church. I need not remind students of mediæval history that offences against the Church were regarded with peculiar sternness, and were held to be most obnoxious to these everlasting pains. But when the Reformation came, a tremendous revolution was accomplished. The Church vanished as a shield between the sinner and the wrath to come. The Reformed Churches renounced the power of the keys, but retained and even intensified the terror. To Calvinism baptism is nothing as a shield, the Lord's Supper is nothing as a shield; all depends on the lively faith of the individual man, and a life in accord with the patterns in the Divine word. Of that life it is said, 'the righteous scarcely are saved,' while some are 'saved so as by fire;' it is a life so lofty and pure that the great multitude are tempted to say that it is quite too high for them, which Calvinism presents to the contemplation of the sinner; while you have heard the alternative in the unutterable horrors which Edwards struggles in vain to describe.

Now there can be no doubt that the manner in which the mediæval Church handled this power of the keys, and

opened or shut the awful gates at pleasure or for pay, gradually exhausted the doctrine of all solemnity and ultimately of all reality. Men ceased to attach much meaning to it. The men of Dunstable, who when they were excommunicated for not paying a tax which seemed to them unfair, calmly informed their Prior that they would rather go to hell than pay an unjust impost, but put into form the thought to which the secular mind had been driven by the shameless policy of the Church. Men said to themselves: 'These unseen things which these priests parade seem very shadowy and unreal; they seem to be able to do what they like with them; we secular people may safely leave them to the clergy who seem to understand them, and go with an honest heart and a good conscience about our secular work.'

And this is the inevitable result of proclaiming incredible doctrine as Christian truth. Men leave it to the priests, or to those whom they call the saints, as a matter with which they have no practical concern. And this opens a dread chasm between the religious life and the sphere of secular duty; between the Church and the world which it was sent to save. This is precisely what is happening now. Calvinism braced immensely the moral tone of society. It would be hard to exaggerate its work in restoring the awe of Divine and spiritual things in human hearts. In a world of fierce contention, of foul vices, of high-handed wrong, and of bitter persecution of the faithful disciples of the Lord, the doctrine

gained new power; chiefly over those who were the objects of the persecution, who lived in the little circle of a narrow but intense religious experience, and to whom the world outside seemed to be already visibly branded with the mark of the devil. But now that Christian people live in happier, and I venture to think holier, relations with the world around them, I note the effort to tone down in every possible way the horror of eternal torment. The moment that a man dies, a thousand kindly traits are eagerly remembered and dwelt upon, as justifying a hope about him; and touches of goodness which would not for an instant have secured him admission to our Churches on earth, are fondly recalled, as nourishing a hope of his admission into the Church in Heaven. I remember smiling to myself at the sermons which were preached in Calvinistic as well as Broad Church pulpits, after the death of the Duke of Wellington and Lord Palmerston. Multitudes discovered something almost saintly about them when dead, who, I imagine, when they were living would have dealt stern judgment on them, and would have closed firmly against them the doors of their narrow fold. And thus it is ever. Propound incredible things, and men will escape in some way from the intolerable pressure; meanwhile the moral tone of the Church gets steadily degraded; it comes at last to cling, like a Church of old of which Isaiah writes, to idols of its own imagination, while it becomes stone-blind to the realities of truth.

But there are multitudes who will say in answer to this argument, 'We do not believe in this eternally vengeful and tormenting God.' I think that I may say, that the Church of our day, in the person of all its most intelligent members and teachers, has renounced this idea of eternal torture as too horrible. There is an almost universal consent to abandon this tradition of Calvinism, among our wisest and most influential ministers; and it is said now, that what is meant by eternal punishment, is the fruit of sin in the sinner, distracting him and tormenting him; eternal exclusion from the home of God, the sphere of light, life, and joy; and eternal condemnation to that dark region where the sinner finds 'his own place' for ever. Here we get clearly on the track of a great truth. I shall have something to say on this version of the doctrine in my last lecture; meanwhile I beg you to consider how far, if this be regarded as a Divine decree, it implies the ordinance of eternal sin. If the sinner is to be left to his sin to punish him, and God ordains that, as regards not the sin, but the sinner, that punishment shall be eternal, then He must decree that the sin shall be eternal. If the sentence be, as Edwards held, a vengeful sentence, and God ordains that for the sin of this mortal life the man who dies impenitent shall be tormented everlastingly, then the moral condition of the sufferer comes as little into the account as the moral state of a criminal on the treadwheel or under the lash. But if the sin itself is to be its own punishment, and it is

ordained that the punishment shall be eternal, then the ordinance must mean that no moan of pain shall ever melt into a sob of penitence; that no pleading, wrestling cry, '*Lord, save, or I perish,*' shall ever burst from a breaking heart while eternity endures.

One other word and I close. It seems to me that it is very possible to attach altogether too much importance to eternal rewards and punishments as motives to action and influences on life. The people whom God called of old into holy fellowship with Himself, whom He called by His name and held forth as His witnesses to all the earth, were taught very little about them; and yet they wrote the Psalms, which still bear to Heaven the prayers and the praises of Christendom, and the oracles which unfold to us still the statutes and ordinances of national life. The Jews knew little about eternal rewards and punishments, but much about the living God.

Life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel. But light is not to see, but to see by. Gaze on the light continually, and a radiant but blinding mist will hide from you the humble path of duty at your feet. The soul that is always looking at what it calls eternal things, disqualifies and disables itself in the end for living the life by which the eternal prize is to be won. Let the light of the eternal fall on the temporal with its solemn, consecrating lustre, through your knowledge of and fellowship with Him who is the Life and the Light of men. Live much in His holy and blessed presence. Let the

mind which was in Christ Jesus be abundantly manifest in you; drink deeply of that spring of vital inspiration which His love has opened for your spirit; and then the humblest path of duty which you daily tread shall stretch up and on, widening and brightening as you travel, till you pass at last triumphant through the gates of the celestial city, and stand, the crowned victor of life's battle, radiant before the eternal throne.

III.

THE DOCTRINE OF ANNIHILATION IN THE LIGHT OF MAN'S NATURE, EXPERIENCE, AND HISTORY.

He is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto Him
Luke xx. 38.

I ENTER now on the consideration of the question, for the sake of which I have undertaken this course of lectures—the ultimate annihilation of the wicked. The doctrine is mixed up with, if it does not rest upon, the denial of what, speaking quite unscholastically, I might call man's natural immortality. Whatever man's natural endowment might have been in his first estate of innocence, it is contended that by the fall he became mortal in soul as well as in body like the brutes. It is further contended, that if any part of his being survives the shock of death, it must be by a distinct act of the Divine will 'deviating secretly from the ordinary course of nature,' as an able advocate of the doctrine expresses it, so as 'to render it possible to recover the identical man from the dead, through the miracle of a resurrection.'[1] It is seen

[1] Rev. E. White, *Life in Christ*, p. 69.

that the passages which establish the resurrection of all, the righteous and the wicked, are too many and too clear to be put aside. So it is held that, though man in death dies, body and soul, like the brutes, and as far as the law of his nature is concerned there is an end of him, God, by a direct intervention, keeps part of him alive till the resurrection. Then the body and the soul of the sinner are to be reunited, that they may be tormented in a lake of fire so long and so sharply as may seem good to the Divine justice, but in any case so that it had been better for the man if he had never been born;[1] then, after that, when justice has been satisfied by his sufferings, he is to be abolished out of the universe for ever. Believers, it is held, receive in regeneration the eternal life, a principle which is essentially immortal, and live on in glorious blessedness; while the great mass of their fellows, naturally mortal as the brutes, having been raised up to be tormented for a season, when their torment is over, fulfil the destiny of their nature, and perish.

The doctrine is variously clothed and presented; but these seem to me to be the bones of it, this is the skeleton which is within.

I have ventured to call this a miserable doctrine; though, strange as it may seem, I see much reason to honour the courage and the intelligence of the men who first broached it. It was one step, at any rate, out of the incredible. But I find it hard to express the intense

[1] Rev. E. White, *Life in Christ*, p. 285.

repugnance with which this doctrine inspires me, whether I look at it from the Divine or the human side. I hope, however, to justify the repugnance, and the strong term by which I have characterised it, before I have finished my next discourse.

I have taken for my text a sentence of Christ, which was spoken in argument on this very subject, and which seems to me utterly fatal to the theory of annihilation. The Sadducees thought that man, soul and body, perished in death. A curious attempt is made by writers of this school of annihilationists, to break the force of this sentence against their theories, by contending that it is the resurrection of the body which is here in question—that as the man Abraham could not be said to live until his body was raised, the fact that he lived in the sight of God involved the certainty of his bodily resurrection. But the Scriptures, blessed be God, never mistake the body for the man; Paul, 'absent from the body,' believed that he would be Paul still. And the resurrection of the body is a phrase which never occurs in the Bible; always it is the resurrection of or from the dead, the standing up again of the man in life, clothed as it pleaseth God, after he has passed through the shock of death. The question here, as the Lord distinctly states, is of the resurrection of *the dead*: '*Now that the dead are raised* even Moses showed at the bush.' How? By bearing the message 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob hath sent me unto you.' God is not the God of the dead

but of the living. Therefore the beings of whom God calls Himself the God, live. But the God who called Himself the God of Abraham called Himself also the God of their fathers, that is of their race, who, therefore, by precisely the same reasoning, were living. And the same God, in the same chapter, calls Himself the God of the Hebrews; and again and again calls the nation, as a nation, by His name—His 'own people,' His 'Kingly priests,' in whom therefore it would seem that He discerned the same undying life. This conclusion seems indisputable, if we are to attach any validity to the reasoning of our Lord. But lest any doubt should rest on the breadth of the humanity which the argument was meant to cover, St. Luke, the Gentile Evangelist, who always brings out the world-wide aspects of Christ's teaching, both in the discourses and the parables, adds an enlargement of the thought which is contained in St. Matthew, and claims the demonstration of immortality for humanity at large—'for all live to Him;' man as man has a unique relation to the Father of spirits, in that he has an immortal nature and lives before the face of God for ever.

In entire harmony with this demonstration of our Lord is the whole witness of Scripture. The immortality of the human soul is not formally taught as a dogma; it is everywhere, after the manner of Scripture, assumed as unquestionable. David was not speaking of an entity of which his people were wholly ignorant, and which needed

elaborate explanation, when he traced the destiny of the immortal part of him, in words which were to be the pilgrim songs of the nation through all their generations, and which must have been pure enigma to them if they believed that their whole being perished in death like the brutes. One can hardly deal seriously with the argument that the 23rd Psalm was written to be sung by men and women whose minds were an utter blank on the subject of immortality. There was no difficulty arising out of the utter ignorance of the Jewish mind about the matter, in the reception of the tale of the recall of the dead prophet to give counsel to the living king. The words of the Bible must be invented to ensnare, if the Jews were intended to believe, that what was written in their earliest records about Enoch meant only that he perished like a beast. Elijah's rapture seemed quite in the true order of things to his prophetic successor; and men trained in the Jewish Scriptures found it in nowise a thing to be doubted, when on the Mount of Transfiguration the man Elijah reappeared. Is it for a moment credible, that Christ in the most awful moment of His anguish commended His spirit to the Father, in words drawn from the Psalter of a people to whom death meant blank annihilation? Would Abigail have dared to use what would have been the blasphemous phrase, 'As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth' (1 Sam. xxv. 26) if she had believed that the soul of David was but the breath of his nostrils like the soul of the beasts—that soul which, as Abigail knew well,

was 'bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord his God'? It was out of the bosom of the Jewish nation, too, that the great party was developed which held the doctrine of the Resurrection. They prided themselves on being true to its traditions and instructed in its Scriptures. And it was as a Pharisee, an heir of Jewish traditions and a student of Jewish theology, appealing expressly to the fathers (Acts xxiii., 6 xxvi. 5–8), that Paul the Apostle claimed the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead as an essential feature of Divine truth.

It is contended by writers of this school that nothing could be more unlikely than that Adam, created in a world where everything was mortal, where through untold ages hosts of creatures had been swept in successive generations to destruction, and were dying still whenever he breathed, wherever he trod, should prove the one exception to the universal law, and be endowed with a spirit destined to survive

> the war of elements
> The wreck of matter, and the crash of worlds.

The simple Hebrew term covers, we are told, the soul of animals and the soul of man; manifestly then they must be the same order and have the same natural destiny. I have not read, however, in the Hebrew Scripture, that God created the beasts in His own image, *in His likeness*; nor do I find Him called the God of the spirits of all the brutes; nor does He speak to, deal with, plead with, the brutes through all the ages of prechristian history as His children, in whom the Father of spirits seems to recognise

the presence of a nature which has close kindred with Himself.

But whatever may have been man's original endowment, we are told that he must have lost it by transgression; that the sentence, 'in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,' either announced, or condemned him to, mortality, and from that time, at any rate, he became as the beasts. On the contrary, I read in the Bible, as immediately consequent on transgression, this remarkable sentence, 'Behold the man is become as one of us, knowing good and evil.' I see a clear recognition here that man had taken a distinct step in the development of his being; he had enlarged the capacity and experience of his nature, while he had lost the regulating principle. He had brought himself by sin within reach of the direst catastrophes on the one hand, while he had brought himself within reach, through grace, of God's great purpose and hope for him, Redemption, on the other. Certainly, if these words mean anything, man could not have lost by transgression that through which alone he could be redeemed. I find, too, that at once, instead of treating him as a being whose nature had sunk to the bestial level, God met him with a promise of Incarnation. A great hope was built on the promise of 'the seed of the woman;' the whole culture of humanity through the Old Testament era was but the bringing out with ever increasing clearness of all that Incarnation meant and foretold. God mixed Himself up as a man

with the life of the human. Already in the early dawn of history the sacred Form may be seen taking its place by the world's hearth fire. The relations He established are human relations; friend, husband, father, are all familiar terms in His revelation of Himself to mankind. And all was promised in the very hour of transgression; all this higher and holier relationship then began to be. Now there are some things that to me are blankly incredible; I cannot help it. I may be weak in judgment and in mental power, but thus it is; it is blankly incredible to me that God could become incarnate in a being whom he regarded as a magnificently-endowed and highly-developed brute. No! Nor did David dream, when he spoke of man as 'little lower than the angels,' that the next rank in the Creation, a little lower only than those pure immortals, was a creature whose breath was in his nostrils, whose whole being was crushed before the moth, and who was compounded only of a handful of finely-manipulated dust.

Think, too, of the unutterable tenderness with which God pleads with and yearns over men; yea, even the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. 'Is Ephraim my dear son, is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still. Therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord.' And this is the keynote of all God's pleadings with the sinful, sensual race He yearned to redeem. Do you ask me to

believe that that unutterable wealth of Divine tenderness was poured forth around a creature whom a brickbat could extinguish in a moment? Ask me to believe at the same time that the Bible is a book of maudlin effusion; and that the God who inspired it, and who wrote His name on Calvary, lives in a world of sentimental dreams.

And when we pass on to the Incarnation, what does 'the Son of Man' mean? The son of an animal? The brother of an animal? 'Seeing that the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself also took part of the same.' Remember, it is here a question of the race. It is David's estimate of man as man in the 8th Psalm, which the writer of the Hebrews tells us Christ came to explain and to justify. It is because He is one with us all, the children of the great human home, bone of our human bone, and flesh of our human flesh, that He calls us brethren. Read the 22nd Psalm, from which Heb. ii. 12 is quoted. You will see that it is to the great human congregation that the Saviour declares, as to His brethren, the name of the Lord. If man has but the animal life which perishes, the whole human congregation, from God's lofty height, are but as a swarm of busy gnats which a flash sweeps into annihilation. Son of man! Brother of man! 'He came to His own, and His own received Him not.' 'He was wounded in the house of his friends.' If *they* have an immortal life of whom God called Himself the God, are the Saviour's 'brethren,' the Saviour's 'own,' only a little higher than the beasts? Ah!

how these deniers of man's immortality murder the brotherhood of the race of which the Redeemer came as the Son. In place of a great human family of sorrow, struggle, and aspiration, amidst which as a brother of the poorest and the saddest the Saviour moved, they give us a few lofty Godlike forms—or say that they give us, men complain that they cannot see them—endowed with a nature which cannot perish, and like unto the angels, moving about as the Brahmins of Creation, amidst innumerable creatures who look like them, speak like them, love like them, but are perishing pariahs, born from the dust.

To me this is simply a horrible picture of the order of the great world of men.

We are instructed by these scholars that Plato, not the Bible, is the teacher of man's immortality. The references to Plato as the true father of the doctrine are abundant in the literature of the annihilationist schools. But the world was full of the idea when Moses led his people forth out of Egypt, and, as Von Bunsen says, history was born. Students of early Egyptian history know well, that not only was the immortality of man's spirit a firm article of belief, but a most elaborate system of future retributions was propounded and kept before the eyes of the people, to be used for his own selfish purposes by that tyrannous terrorist, the priest. There are able scholars who believe that it was the excess of this doctrine of retribution, the use which was made of it, and

the evil which grew out of it to the miserable priest-ridden people, which explains its withdrawal from the forefront of the Mosaic legislation, and the setting forth of a more vital, more central truth, man's living relation to the living God, in its stead.[1] And there is perhaps something more to be said about it, at which I can only at present glance. In a low stage of moral development the doctrine, in the hands of a learned and powerful priesthood, may easily become immoral, a mere rule of terror; while the simple, grand, noble truth which was preached to the Jewish people, Do right because God loves it, and His blessing goes with it, while His curse goes with wrong, lies at the basis of all high moral development here or in any world. Thus the absence of this doctrine from the legislation of the Pentateuch, may help to explain the singular freedom from priestly tyranny which the Jews enjoyed. But none the less was it present with them, a stimulating, quickening influence in the atmosphere of their life.

But through the whole earth, in Egypt, in Assyria, in Greece, as we gather from the Homeric poems, in India, the idea was established and was a tremendous factor in the life of the world. Sin cast its terrible shadow over man's immortal existence, and so it came to pass that the pictures presented by priests and poets smelt of the grave and gloomed of the night. But still the thing was there.

[1] See the remarks on this subject in Ewald's *History of Israel*.

Man was haunted everywhere by this vision of immortality. In India the torment of the thought of personal responsibility, will, choice, activity, was so terrible that the religion of a third of the human race won its way to power, not by denying immortality, but by promising a painless absorption of the individual spirit into the supreme as its bliss. Everywhere the belief clings to man and is, in all ages, in all countries, the instrument by which the priest rules and constantly blights his life.

Here, then, you have a belief well-nigh universal, coming forth into full prominence in all the wisest and most cultivated peoples; but in the absence of Revelation for the most part dim, dark, and sad, through the sinful sadness of life. The time came when in the field of Revelation 'life and immortality' were 'brought to light;' not born, not created, but brought out of the world of guesses, hopes, and shadows, into light. The reality was laid bare by the Gospel, which explained perfectly this universal human belief and experience. Man's belief in immortality was amply sustained and justified when immortality was brought to light by Christ. We are literally asked by these annihilationists to believe that this was quite a new doctrine, having reference to quite a new order of things under Christianity, and that the all but universal belief in it which preceded its full revelation had absolutely no truth in it, and belonged to the world of delusion and dreams. Is it come to this? Are we shut up to the belief that the heathen peoples of the world had visions of

the essential dignity of man's nature and the largeness of his destiny, which made his sin seem shameful and his previsions of its retribution terrible; while the Scriptures of truth, which proclaim that the Incarnate God died that this human race might be saved, declare throughout the whole elder dispensation that the race is, after all, of the same order as the brutes. I would that these despisers of man's immortality would wake up to see what a tremendous weapon they are putting into the hands of the Atheist, in slighting these deepest and most universal convictions of the great human world. I know that I shall be told, 'Oh! we believe that man is of higher quality than the brutes; he is an intelligent, moral, and responsible being, and we by no means confound him with the creature.' But the answer to this is clear and stern: if you prove that man's nature and life are spoken of as co-ordinate with those of the brutes at one end of the scale, and cut off immortality at the other, you leave no room for the play of this higher life of man, no ground for it to stand on. Men will say inevitably, 'If this is what your Bible teaches, the Materialist is right. Reason is but accumulated experience, and will is but the discharge of a battery, the cells of which are all arranged in due order within.' The notion of a soul immortal enough to live through death, but not immortal enough to live on for ever, is too childish to be entertained beyond the little school of literalists who delight in it. The world outside will be content to believe that that which proves its powers

to live through death claims its immortality. Long, long may it be before this dismal school tempts either Church or world to abandon for this doctrine of degradation, the teachings of Scripture, the witness of the Incarnation, and the most sacred and elevating beliefs of mankind!

But it is when we lift our eyes and look round at this great human world, this profound and wonderful human life, into which 'the powers of the world to come' enter at every point as essential factors, and which seems framed on a scale so large that it demands eternity to develope and to complete it, that this doctrine most degrades mankind. Human life, from the very first, was ordained, was laid out, upon a plan which contemplated immortality. It is a dread, a tremendous endowment, this power of will, with the inward conflict and anguish into which man is of necessity plunged; for they begin with the first dawnings of consciousness, and the materials for the strife are laid up in every nature that is born into the world. We come into the world by no act of our own. We are endowed with a nature, a flesh, whose openness to temptation we had no hand in making, and we find ourselves surrounded by a world which tempts it with resistless pressure, whose structure was ordained without the slightest reference to our will. Sin we must, in one sense; the sin of man is universal; yet sin we must not; a voice within and a voice above warn us that it is pollution, ending inevitably in remorse and death. Here

is the anguish of life; a nature prone fatally to transgression, a spirit which denounces that transgression as madness, and prophesies as its doom misery and despair. And the struggle, the agony, is universal; the world of earth is one great scene of spiritual strain and anguish, whose moans would drown the music of the morning stars, if there were not eternity to unfold the mystery, and to reveal that at the heart of it all there is ineffable and infinite love.

The struggle for life is solemn in the lower Creation; it would be unutterably sad if there were the human consciousness there; the reason which 'looks before and after;' the abiding memory of joy or pain; the power of foreseeing and of foretasting misery and bliss. If all the outward visible storm and strife, by which the creatures who are palpably glad in their life, 'have their day, and cease to be,' were but the outward sign of an inward spiritual anguish, we should shrink from the vision of life with horror. The procession of life would then be a march which a demon only could lead, and at the head of which a demon only could rejoice. In man, through this inward spiritual strain and travail, you come manifestly into the sphere of the Divine and the eternal. His nature imagines of necessity eternity as its sphere. It strains to it; it is always lifting the veil of death, in hope, in dread, and peering into what is behind, for it knows that its destiny is there. And unless all is 'Maya' illusion, as Hindoo philosophers tell us, it must, with all its

tremendous burdens, all its confused problems, all its vast capacities, have eternity before it to work out its issues and to reap its fruits.

And it is human life of which I am speaking, the life of the great human world; not the life of the company of 'professors,' who think that they have a monopoly of spiritual experience and spiritual destiny. I read lofty words about the wonderful excellence and eminence of the professing Christian; and the tone prevalent[1] in this school of writers is to me a sad one, about the wickedness, the wretchedness, the worthlessness of the world outside. The longer I live the more clearly do I seem to see the essential falseness of these sharp divisions. I see constantly in the poor world outside traces of noble, beautiful, even heavenly qualities and actions, side by side with things that are manifestly sensual, selfish, dishonest, or base; just as I see signs of very narrow, envious, and selfish passions staining the lives of good, self-devoted, and pure-minded Christian men. And I think that I understand better than I did, why it was this world outside that Jesus loved to dwell with; why He found His tenderness drawn forth to the great mass of humanity which 'the wise' and 'the righteous' thought meet only for perdition; and why He was sure that He should find chiefly among this class His disciples and friends. His eye was ever keen to catch the traces of the stirrings of

[1] I say prevalent; I am far from saying that it is universal.

desire or impulse which looked towards His kingdom, in persons or classes who seemed to be most remote from it; and it is strange how our ears are dulled to those tremendous words which ought to be ever ringing through Christendom, which He spake to the self-affirmed righteous of His time: 'I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you.'

The instances of noble self-denial and self-devotion among the poorest of the poor, who make no profession of belief, who hardly know what you mean by it, put me and many of us, with our blessed opportunities of Christian culture, to shame. Poor women who have toiled the long day through at such toil as we should not touch with our dainty fingers, weary, faint, half-fed, will watch by a sick neighbour through the long night, fearless of infection; and then wake, after a snatch of slumber, to work again. A poor household with one loaf will halve it with the poorer next door who have none. 'The wicked' we label them, and pass on our way. Blessed be Christ! He has told us that He cares for the wicked. He marks and records what has no earthly remembrancer; He made His home, He has His home, among the outcast poor. And think what toils are manfully borne, what sacrifices are cheerfully made, what anguish is bravely endured, for love. We little estimate the healing, purifying influence of the love that abounds on earth, through all its selfishness and sin, on the lives of men. It is the salt which saves them from corruption, it is the consecration which lends

some sacredness, at any rate, to the commonest life. Wonderful is the wearing toil that love sustains, the life-long struggle that love endures, the ceaseless sacrifice that love offers, in the poorest homes, and, in a way that is a great mystery, often in the darkest and most ignorant hearts. Ah! if charity covereth a multitude of sins, there is many a sin covered by love, in homes that we should brand as hotbeds of corruption, and in hearts that we should drive out scornfully to the pit.

But whither does this tend? Is man saved by an act of self-denial, or by a life whose hue of transgression is chequered by gleams of unselfish and beautiful love? No; I believe as firmly as any man can believe, that there is no name given under heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Christ. I believe that the life eternal, that which lifts existence into life, is born only of the Spirit, the inworking and indwelling of the Spirit in human hearts. I believe that in the order of the ascending stages of creation, which the philosophers—and we have no call to contradict them, let them settle it—tell us that they can trace upwards from the lowest atom of vital tissue to man, man, at the head of the physical order, the most perfect type of form, was quickened with a life which related him at once to a higher order of being, and made him in his nature a link between two worlds. I believe that he was thus constituted with a view to his redemption; and that in the purpose of God who endowed him with an immortal nature, existence is to be lifted and

transformed into life eternal, life blessed and glorious like God's, by the knowledge of Him who died as the propitiation for our sin on Calvary, as borne in by the Spirit and planted as a vital germ of salvation in the core of the sinner's heart. But I believe further, and Christ is my clear warrant for the belief, that He has far, far wider and closer dealings with these prodigals and pariahs of the human Creation, outside this 'immortal caste,' than any of us dream; dealings which the righteous 'elder son' always views with distrust and stings with scorn. And I am sure through Christ that these dim workings of noble and beautiful powers in dark, sad, sinful hearts are too precious to be swept to annihilation; they are not spiritual life, but they are workings of the human, not born without the Spirit, I believe firmly, with which the Spirit seeks to join Himself, that He may purify and elevate them by faith to vital principles of action, and save them by the knowledge of the truth; and I say that if in your system of things they are of slight account, and may be swept out carelessly before they have had the fair chance even of fruiting, as meet only for destruction, you open to me the vision of an intolerable, an incredible spiritual waste.

And I pray you to consider what life is to the great mass of our fellow men. I do not mean through their own personal transgressions, but through the hardness of the conditions under which, by no choice of their own, they are constrained to live. We should shudder if we could realise how many wasted brains, tormented nerves,

and breaking hearts, through the pressure of the struggle for life, the world contains at this moment; souls whose mute cry to the God who made them is, The strain is too hard, unbind me and let me go. Who shall measure the desolations of tyranny and war, of slavery and wrong? Who shall weigh the miseries of which our splendid commerce is the parent, to those who 'sing the song of the shirt' in its workshops, or utter the 'cry of the human' in the lairs in which its helots herd like the beasts? We hear much from well-fed, well-clad, well-housed gentlemen, of the comfort of the life of a skilled working man. I think of it sometimes when I see our tramway men, snatching their bit of dinner out of a basin in the cars in the intervals of their journeys; working on from early morning till late at night day after day, month after month, in all weathers, with the prospect of working on thus incessantly till they drop in death. And their lot is a happy one compared with that of millions in our free and wealthy England, and of hundreds of millions throughout the world, whose life is one long death-grapple with famine, and who sigh daily for the grave 'where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.'

Ah! Christian friends, with home and food and fire, and literature and society and travel, and 'all things richly to enjoy,' think sometimes of the terrible contrasts of society. Think of the 'Arab' child trained to crime from his youth and nursed in misery; think of whole classes, in number millions to your thousands, shut out

from all that makes life beautiful and goodly to you; and then think of them if you can, if you dare, swept out to annihilation, without a chance of learning the meaning of life's benediction, without a hope of ever being within reach of tasting how blessed a thing it may be to be. The terrible inequalities of society in a world of which God has not resigned the kingship, and of the whole outcome of whose life He accepts the responsibility by maintaining it in existence, would be dark, dark indeed, if there were no hope of their redress in the boundless range of the universe and of man's undying existence; if we might not dare to believe that every soul that is judged of God shall have at some time some fair field for the exercise of its freedom, and some clear vision of what may be possible for life.

'But they have heard; this, at any rate, is a Gospel land; if any perish here they perish in wilful unbelief.' Have they heard? I tell you there are multitudes in this London of ours who have never heard the name of Christ but in jests or in blasphemies. Multitudes more to whom its music has been miserably marred by controversial screech-pipes or priestly mumblings, and to whom its light has become utterly dimmed as it flashed through 'the smoke of the torment' of the pit. Are they never to hear of the love of Christ, as Christ would have preached it? Are the souls whom He died to redeem, and whom as He entered the cloud of the Passion He gathered to His heart, never, never, through a long

eternity to hear the music of Christ's invitation, or have a chance of tasting the sweetness of His love? The Church was once more pitiful. The bright gleam of hope which was suggested by 'the preaching to the spirits in prison' was caught and cherished. Wise teachers held that all, in some full, fair form, should hear the Gospel before they were judged for neglecting it; should know the value of the pearl before they were doomed for casting it away. But this doctrine is pitiless. When the man dies, no matter what the limitations, the difficulties, the disabilities, the natural miseries of his life, there is an end of him. If a part of him is kept alive in partial animation, it is not the man. The man is only restored for a time to his wholeness in the resurrection, to pass straight into the lake of fire on his way to the extinction of his being for ever.

And the great heathen world around! The soul sickens and shudders when it contemplates the picture which is painted of their doom. The 'ferocious African warriors,' the 'Tartar hordes' who have swooped upon the homes of civilisation, figure in the dread array of the great human horde that is destined to extinction. Well! we know something of the ferocious African; paint him as dark as you will, you cannot paint him dark enough. But read Moffat on 'African Missions;' see what has been done for him by the intense and Christlike labours of that venerable patriarch of African evangelists. Nay, read in Sir S. Baker's 'Ismaïlia,' what his 'forty thieves,'

all 'ferocious Africans,' were when he mustered them, and what they became before he left them. Open his 'Albert N'yanza,' and see how the Latooka savages, finding one of a marauding Nubian band, who had inflicted dreadful wrong on them, separated from his company, starved, and hiding himself in terror, took him to their huts, fed him, healed him, and conducted him to his camp in peace. Read in Dr. Schweinfurth's travels — a Bongo native, who had joined the slave traders in a cruel invasion of the Dinka country, was dangerously wounded, and laid himself down at the door of a Dinka's hut to die. The Dinka took him in, defended him from the fury of his people, fed and nursed him till he was healed, and then sent him under an escort home.

Hear the witness of our glorious Livingstone, whose heart sleeps, where it ought to sleep, in the land he so passionately loved. 'At Senna a slave woman was seized by a crocodile; four Makololo rushed in unbidden and rescued her, though they knew nothing about her.' Ah! brethren, how many of us, who number ourselves among the elect, would have dared it? Some, blessed be God; Christlike Christians who would give their lives for men, are not so rare in our world. And the world loves them and honours them unspeakably when it finds them. But how many of our loudest professors who challenge the world to judge of the Gospel by their lives, would have found a thousand reasons for thinking of themselves, their families, their work, rather than of the drowning

slave? Do you wonder that our great traveller, when he saw such signs as these, was pressed to say, 'The deep dark question of what is to become of such as these, must, however, be left where we find it, believing that assuredly the Judge of all the earth will do right.' 'I don't know how the great loving Father will bring all out right at last; but He knows and will do it.'

Here is a vision of what the ferocious African can become under the touch of a *man's* loving wisdom and strength. Is he never, never to have the chance of learning what he could become under Christ's? *We* know about the ferocious Africans—are they more ferocious though than the jealousies and hatreds of the Church?—and Christ knows; and it was for such wretched, vile, savages as they seem, that Christ came to die. It was the world, the world, not of saints but of rebels, the world of cruelty, greed, lust, and wrong, that the Lord came to pity, to help, and to save. Dare you believe that His love sees nothing before countless generations, through countless ages, each capable of yielding such pearls as these, but annihilation? Think you that the heart that burst on Calvary feels no yearning to clasp them to its embrace? Are the tears of Christ the rain that is for ever to fall on love's futile longings to express itself? Is the Cross the only force in this great Universe which is to be stricken to impotence by the hand of Death?

Let me say a word, too, on a practical point. We are told that man as man is mortal as the brutes. We are

told that a band of immortals, men of the order of the angels, differing in nature essentially from the herd, having a life over which death is powerless, while on the mass of common men death feeds at will, is in our midst. They should need be pure, lofty, god-like spirits, these men of a higher order of being; the light of a Divine life should be seen very plainly playing about their brow, their breath should be felt to be redolent of the atmosphere of their native heaven. Once the common people heard Christ gladly; for the people have a keen eye for spiritual beauty and power. But the complaint is now of the littleness, the narrowness, the selfishness, the worldliness of the sphere in which the only immortals of our race profess to dwell. It seems to me that they are lending a terrible support to the cause of the materialists. They say to them plainly, You materialists are right; man, body and soul, is mortal as a beast; but here and there there is an immortal man to be met with, and the sign whereby he is to be known is the manifest life of God. Now, unless they show that life of God, unless they reveal the heavenly mind which bears its own witness to men that it has descended from a celestial sphere, the negations of their doctrine, in the judgment of men, will triumph, men will cease to believe in any immortality. They will simply blind the whole Christian host, and lead it helpless into the camp of its materialistic and atheistic foes.

Do I hint a doubt of conversion by these words, of the

life which is born of God in the spirit? God forbid! Wherever I see a gleam of spiritual light, a glow of spiritual life, in a human brother, I hail it as the sign of the inworking of that Spirit through whom alone we can divinely live. But that Spirit is working with a largeness and freeness of operation in the human which we may not dare to limit, as if He divided that human into two great, organically, diverse worlds. I cling to the brotherhood; I claim and hold to brotherhood of nature, of endowment, of responsibility, of destiny, with the poorest, the most ignorant, the most wretched, the most sinful of mankind.

One fatal flaw in this system seems to be developed, by the effort of its advocates to connect the man who dies, body and spirit, in death, with the resurrection and the judgment. The man dies and is done with; all returns to dust. But God, we are told, 'secretly deviating from the ordinary course of nature'—which implies, if it means anything, a Divine trick, but which, as it affects every member of the human race, is manifestly a Divine law with no secrecy about it—keeps some part alive; not the 'person,' that will not appear till the resurrection, but some part which will establish a link of connection between the man who perished in death and the judgment day. Now, what is that something that lives on? The man is dead, body and soul, he has ceased to be, as man. Is this new thing that appears a new creation, something called into being to take the place of the dead thing? If

so, it cannot be called to bear the burden of the dead. Or is it the soul, the human person, the person in which Paul, absent from the body, believed that he should be present with Christ, the person to which Christ addressed the promise, 'This day shalt *thou* be with me in Paradise'?

If so, what we call the soul has passed unmaimed through death; and nothing can destroy it but the fiat of God. That idea I shall have to consider in the light of God's character and ways, in the next discourse. But if every man lives on after death, just as the righteous live on, let us have done with the notion of 'secret deviations' and 'violations of natural order,' and accept frankly what this living on of every man through death necessarily implies, man's immortality. The theory fails, it seems to me, at every point. Tried Scripturally it fails, tried morally it fails, tried metaphysically it fails, and fails utterly. It is a vain imagination, an idol of the mind, a dreary, but, thank God, a baseless dream.

One word more. We are assured that this doctrine is 'full of comfort to many.' It shows how terrible is the pressure of the mediæval doctrine, when many a noble, tender heart that I know, can find comfort in this. Comfort! Great God, was Thy Gospel sent to give comfort to a man, by the vision of the extinction of the great mass of his fellows, like gnats before a summer storm? Missionaries too are told to take it with them, to strengthen and cheer them for their work. To me the thought would be an intolerable burden, that I was standing alone, a being

of an immortal nature, among myriads of struggling, suffering human animals, the great mass of whom must inevitably, after torment, be swept out of existence for ever. I might love them so tenderly as to be willing even to be 'accursed from Christ' for them, but I must not dare to call them brethren. There is a great chasm between our natures; I, immortal, and by nature level with the angels; they, mortal, and by nature level with the beasts. I could not face that as a missionary. But I could bear to feel, not without a solemn awe, but with a stedfast trust in God, as Livingstone felt, that my sad, sinful brethren were passing into the presence of the Master who loved them, as I could never love them, and who *must* do right, right by the measures of Calvary, in all His decrees. But one thing as a missionary I would hold fast, whatever else might perish. The Saviour calls the weakest and vilest of these idolaters *His* brethren; and nothing should tear the sense of my oneness of nature with the poorest and saddest of these *my* brethren from my heart. 'BUT GOD IS NOT THE GOD OF THE DEAD, BUT OF THE LIVING; FOR ALL LIVE TO HIM.' AMEN.

IV.

THE DOCTRINE OF ANNIHILATION IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S CHARACTER AND WAYS.

God sent not His Son into the World to condemn the World, but that the World through Him might be saved.—*John* iii. 17.

'Our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.' The abolition of death, according to the doctrine of annihilation, means a sweeping destruction of the teeming millions of human mortals whom Christ died to redeem; the bringing of life and immortality to light means, by this same rule, the miserable extinction of vast human masses whom the light but lit to judgment, torment, and the everlasting night. To me this is, I thank God, a wholly incredible Gospel. Nor is the representation which I have made in the least too strong. The matter, according to writers of this school, stands thus. The sentence, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,' meant, and could mean nothing else, than 'immediate and hopeless dissolution.' But Adam sinned and lived on. Why? Because God, we

are told by these expositors, suspended His sentence in mercy, that man might become the subject of redeeming agencies, the acceptance of which would make him the possessor, through grace, of a blessing far larger than that which he had forfeited through sin.

Adam and his race had the sentence suspended over them, until the results of these gracious agencies should be seen and their fruits secured. But that ministry of redemption altered, we are told, the conditions of life for all men. It secured for all, or inflicted upon all, whether righteous or wicked, heathen or Christian, prolonged existence after the death of the body, and resurrection to the final judgment; while for all who had not found life in Christ it involved the condemnation to torment, more or less terrible, and ultimate annihilation. The great mass of men, never having heard the name of Christ, have never had the faintest chance of finding life in Christ. Their condition, then, according to this scheme, is made infinitely more wretched and terrible through this 'system of mercy.' The sentence was death for sin; death meaning, and being understood to mean, 'immediate and hopeless dissolution.' Well, had the sentence been carried out there would have been an end of the race; or at any rate, supposing that the years of the mortal life had been granted, men would have died under the sentence like an untimely birth, with one gasp of pain. The angels might have been left to wonder over this abortive effort of the Supreme; but all the horror which this doctrine heaps up

would have been spared. But the Gospel, which is a ministry of mercy to the world, has, according to this doctrine, secured this for the great majority of the inhabitants of the world, that they shall live on after death in darkness and dread till the resurrection, when they shall be condemned still to live on for a space in horrible torments; and then, when they have satisfied a vindictive justice, and then only, will Lethe flow over them and their miseries, and, let me add, their wrongs for ever.

Thus the Gospel, which was to abolish death and to bring life and immortality to light, becomes the source of unutterable and incalculable misery to the great mass of mankind; who, but for this Gospel which they were never within reach of hearing, would have suffered under the original sentence on transgression, would have dropped quietly out of existence, and have ceased to think, to feel, and to suffer for ever. Truly an awful Gospel for a Christian man to preach to his fellow men; a Gospel not incredible only, but terrible, and certain to provoke the antagonism of all that is best in man's nature wherever it may be proclaimed.

It is hinted, indeed, that there may be reasons unknown to us, connected with the order and the welfare of the great system of the Universe, which may justify and even demand this hard measure, not of justice, for there is no justice about it, but of severity, to the great multitude who are outside the Gospel pale. I can only say that it would be a horror to me to be connected with a Universe

which could demand such a process and be blessed by it; and my own prayer would be that I might go swiftly to annihilation with my brethren, and be out of the region of the wrong and the misery for ever.

This doctrine of annihilation seems to me to be very closely connected with the idea—which has ruled largely in the region of theological thought since the early days of the Church, though tempered and lightened in its bearings, until Calvinism arose, by the 'power of the keys'—that Christ came to seek and to save the elect few ordained to believe on Him, while the rest were left unpitied to rot in the corruption of sin, and to settle down into the everlasting night. The fewness of the saved, the multitude of the lost, are notions which we constantly meet with in this literature; and there is too often a tone of lofty superiority to poor sinners, an exclusive thought and care for the righteous, as if the Universe existed for them alone, which seem to me to be rebuked by almost every word and work of our Lord. From what Gospel do these teachers learn to press with the utmost stringency every text which seems to limit the possible activities of grace, towards those whom mercy once pitied upon earth, in the world which lies beyond; and to ignore or to explain away every passage, even from Christ's own lips, which seems to open a larger hope?

'A good case,' says an advocate of this doctrine whose ability and earnestness none can question, 'is made out for almost everybody, in direct opposition to Christ's words

that "few find the narrow way that leadeth unto life," that none shall escape destruction except those "who hear His sayings and do them." The comparative fewness of the saved, and the necessity of agonising to enter in at the strait gate, is one of the prominent lessons of the New Testament, and indeed of the whole Bible.'[1] Not a word here of the world-embracing purpose of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord; of the *one* lost piece out of the ten; of the *one* lost sheep out of the hundred, sought by the shepherd with weary, bleeding feet through all the paths of its wanderings; of the word of Christ on the threshold of the last agony, hardly to be overlooked, one would have thought, when such a matter was in question, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me;' or of the statements of Paul as to the meaning and method of God's dealings with the Jewish people, in which the Bible everywhere directs us to study the meaning and methods of His ways with the great human world, which are set forth in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. No, these are all passed by, that a sentence of special stringency might be pressed to its uttermost meanings, and held forth as containing on this subject the epitome of the doctrine of the word of God.

And it runs through the whole scale of the literature. In the pamphlets with which I am deluged — nine-

[1] Rev. E. White, *Life in Christ*, p. 45.

tenths of which seem to me to repeat with wearisome monotony the same vapid arguments and cruel criticisms, for they are all on the hard side—I find, for instance, every passage in the Psalms paraded and counted up which prophesies the destruction of the wicked, and describes the terrors of God's wrath against them; while the texts which, I venture to say, occur more frequently than any other class of passages in the Psalms—these writers are fond of counting texts—describing God's mercy as 'enduring for ever,' are wholly passed by. Why, even the Talmudists might rebuke them. In the literary Remains of Emmanuel Deutsch you will find (p. 147) that great master of Talmudic lore instructing us in the merciful aspects which, according to the Talmud, the Old Testament presented to humanity at large. 'Scripture said, "Ye shall walk in the words of the Lord." "But the Lord is a consuming fire—how can man walk in his way?" "By being," they answered, "as He is—merciful, loving, long-suffering. Mark on the first page of the Pentateuch God clothed the naked—Adam; and in the last He buried the dead—Moses. He heals the sick, frees the captives, does good to His enemies, and He is merciful both to the living and to the dead."' But more sharply and sternly, surely, does Christ's sentence of rebuke fall upon them, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' In truth the doctrine is, to the heart's core of it, a Pharisaic doctrine, and can never be accepted in a

Church which has a firm grasp of its Christian mission, to help, to bless, and to save mankind.

In the logical argument, of course, immense stress is laid on the assertion, that most of the words which are applied in Scripture to describe the future doom of the wicked, are words which in their original and natural sense convey what we mean by destruction. It is freely allowed. It could hardly be otherwise. When men project their thoughts into the spiritual and invisible sphere, they take the terms with which they are familiar in the visible material sphere, and enlarge their meanings to the measures of that larger world. Christianity added a new world of meaning to well-known and constantly-employed terms in the classical languages of antiquity. Among these were 'life' and 'death,' 'salvation,' and 'ruin' or 'destruction.' Refuse to recognise this spiritual enlargement of meaning, and a Christian terminology becomes impossible.

But, it is said, these words which imply destruction are always used in the exact literal meaning. That, of course, is the question which has to be determined. Let us take a crucial instance and test it. We are assured that death has an exact and constant meaning—dissolution—and that Adam had the key to what the threatening of death meant in all that he saw around him in the world. There is a saying of Christ in which this word is employed with emphasis, and from which we may gather whether our Lord meant that the natural meaning of the word

should be enlarged to cover a correspondent experience in the spiritual sphere: 'If a man keeps My saying he shall never see death,' 'He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' That word was spoken after the death of a man who believed and had suffered dissolution; and who, restored to life for the moment, would see dissolution again. To say that the word meant the same thing exactly as dissolution, only postponed to the end of countless ages, when not a hint of it is dropped in the text, is mere trifling with language. It is manifest that our Lord meant to direct our thoughts to a new and Christian meaning of death, that which to the spirit, which the annihilationists are compelled to allow can live on and will live on through dissolution, corresponds to the experience of death in the body—the absence of all that constitutes in the higher meaning of the word, its life. Here we have passages in the discourses of our Lord, in which we have a means of testing the sense which these annihilationist words are meant to bear in Christian doctrine, and we find that the narrow literalness of these interpreters fails.

But they are not true to their own meaning of words. If destruction were the punishment, and at death the man perished according to their scheme, at least they would have the virtue of consistency. But the real punishment is not destruction, but existence; there is a sad separate state of souls for countless ages; there is resurrection, there are again unknown periods of torment, and then

the destruction comes when the punishment is over, to bury the wreck of it from the sight of day. It is mere idleness to talk about death being the punishment, and death meaning destruction, with all this awful apparatus of torment behind.

But the terms which are constantly associated with these words, whose natural meaning would imply destruction, ought to warn us, as in the case of the language of Christ already quoted, that there is a larger spiritual meaning to be discerned. Contentious literalists, one would think, must recognise that 'everlasting punishment' is about the most misleading term that could possibly be employed, if what was to be understood was literal destruction. The phrases in question are constantly employed with qualifying adjuncts which indicate a condition of consciousness, and which imperatively point us to this spiritual meaning. If destruction were meant, it seems incredible that it should so constantly be associated with images of pain and terror implying a conscious subject. Paul in a remarkable passage, in a profoundly argumentative epistle, describes the future of sinners as an experience of 'indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish,' which determines the sense which he puts on 'perish.' I ask any one to read for himself the words of the New Testament, keeping, if he can, all this word-wrangle out of his mind, and judge for himself whether it does not seem to anticipate for all men a condition of conscious existence, in which the issues of life are to be worked out through eternity.

But the literalists, like other theological schools, are literal only when it suits them. In the parable of Dives there is a description of a man in Hades with lips and tongue. If the letter is to be pressed, here is a conclusive argument against the notion of this school, about a separate state of disembodied spirits between death and the resurrection. We may say in passing that Paul knew nothing about these disembodied spirits. 'Not unclothed but clothed upon,' is the vision opened to him of our experience in dying. And this parable is clearly against the notion. Whereupon an able writer of the school, already referred to, argues, quite soundly I think, in the following words: 'The argument that language is employed appropriate to the incarnate condition, and altogether unsuited to the condition of disembodied spirits, will not appear of much weight to him who reflects that if the subject of the intermediate state was to be spoken of at all, it must necessarily be invested with drapery suited to strike the imaginations of "men in the flesh," who have no cognisance of a purely immaterial world, and no terms fitted to describe it.'[1] Nothing could be more just; it is exactly the principle for which we contend. We are all like little children sporting or trembling on the shore of that great unknown ocean, and the Bible speaks to us as to children, while it lifts us, educates us, to be men. It uses words to help our imagination as

[1] *Life in Christ*, p. 229.

being yet in the flesh; but it demands of us that we shall lift up our minds to interpret them, by what it reveals to us of the measures of that mysterious, unsearchable, spiritual world.

But before I pass from this part of my subject, let me say a word on the method which I pursue. Many will no doubt be surprised and puzzled because I am not conducting my argument by means of elaborate and minute textual criticism. The reason is this. There is a certain number of texts bearing on this subject, of which the most important may almost be counted on the fingers, the meaning of which is fiercely debated. Most of them contain terms which are ambiguous or perplexing; and each party contends strenuously that the word which looks their way should be regarded as the key. One term, for instance, will imply perishing; another will seem to imply sustained consciousness. But the point on which the stress is laid depends entirely on the theological prepossessions of the writer. It is easy for the experienced to prophesy the interpretations of any particular school. It will bring its creed to bear upon it, that is the view of the whole counsel of God which it gathers from the study of the Bible at large. This may be easily illustrated by a simple instance. In 1 Tim. v. 6 St. Paul describes one living in pleasure as 'dead while she liveth.' Here, it seems to us, is an indisputable instance of the spiritual meaning of the word 'death'—a woman dead while alive. No, say our opponents, the metaphor here is in the tense,

not in the word. She is described as dead because she will be dead in time. This seems to us quite idle, but it is really the interpretation of the theology of the interpreter. It is for this reason that I have endeavoured to treat of those general considerations, drawn from the whole Bible, which may guide your study and interpretation of the particular texts which may be under debate.

And now we will look at the doctrine in its broader moral aspects, and see what light is cast upon it by the great ideas of Revelation, by the character of God, and His aims and methods in the spiritual government of mankind.

The first thing which strikes us is the enormous increase in the penalty of transgression. The original sentence was simple and clear: 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' They tell us that this means simply and plainly 'dissolution,' the extinction of the life of the creature man. I wholly dissent from this. I believe that the sentence had a far deeper meaning, but I take their own interpretation. Dissolution seemed to the all-wise and almighty Ruler the meet penalty for transgression. We can understand the justice of that. Man was made to know and to glorify God by loving obedience; if he chose to rebel, we can understand that a suffering, struggling life and then annihilation might be the just penalty. But behind this dissolution there is a vast and terrible array of torments, which may keep the

being for untold ages on the rack of intolerable pain. I know that I shall be told that this enlargement of the penalty is the inevitable concomitant of that Redemptive system under which the first sentence was suspended; involving the choice between a larger blessing and a darker doom.

But it is confessed that this offer of mercy has been made to but a little fraction of the human race. The rest have hardly sinned 'after the similitude of Adam's transgression,' for the law to them was far less clearly and directly explained. Adam had it from the lips of God; he sinned, and came under the sentence which, we are told, meant the extinction of his being, and which God regarded as the appropriate punishment of his guilt. But the great mass of mankind gather the law against which they sin but dimly from the witness of the conscience and the traditions of the past, which constantly lead them astray. Yet, we are told, they are subjected, without a word of warning, to this tremendous extension of penalty for what is really mere venial and pitiable sin. It is no longer dissolution, but misery in Hades, then resurrection to judgment, then the lake of fire, and then only at last, after all this agony, the doomsman's stroke. One fails to discern here the faintest recognition of the simplest ideas of right. The conduct presented here is the purest tyranny. It outrages every sentiment of justice which God has planted and keeps alive, as part of the image of Himself, in human hearts.

Behind this another difficulty looms darkly.

The first sentence was death. Man either was originally, or became by transgression, mortal as the brutes. He died, and there was an end of him. At death his consciousness, his power of repeating his transgression and harming himself or his fellows, expired. Is there not something at which one shudders in the thought of his being brought to life again, after enduring the penalty which God ordained for his transgression, for nothing but to suffer; literally having a new life put into him by the direct fiat of God, and in violation of 'the natural order,' which disposed of him finally in death? A being living as a sinner a wretched life, crying like the first flagrant transgressor, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear,' and then perishing—that were a sad enough picture. But this pitiless doctrine brings the man to life again, when he has, according to their theory, ceased to be, simply that he may be tormented. It dooms him to exist in shuddering dread in Hades till earth's sad history is ended; and then to rise to judgment, with the certainty that, after maddening awhile in the lake of fire, he will fall back into the annihilation from which he was recovered, that he might endure the beating of all this storm of pain.

It is not a question of a free being endowed with an immortal nature, choosing, after full warning that eternal issues were waiting on the decisions of his will, rebellion rather than submission, pain rather than blessedness, hell

rather than heaven. That were a terrible picture of the future of the Universe, if it presented the destiny of the great mass of mankind. But that is not comparable in horror to the picture here—a creature fairly dead, having paid the original penalty which God attached to his transgression, brought to life again simply and solely to suffer. Human governments in their mercy have abolished torture before death. However flagrant the crime, no Christian Government dares postpone the execution of the last sentence that the criminal may be tormented. A human monarch, who should keep the criminals on whom sentence of death has been pronounced, alive that they might agonise under the horror of their condition, and taste keen torture before the doomsman's stroke, would wither on his throne under the execration of mankind. And yet this is the aspect under which the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is rich in mercy, is presented to the world.

No plea of satisfaction to the monarch's government or of warning to other transgressors, would be allowed on earth to stand as valid, in justification of the torture of a criminal on whom the sentence of death has been passed. And it is Christianity which has taught us this benignant lesson, and has made us understand at last that

> Earthly power doth then shew likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice.

Yet here are Christian teachers instructing us that all

this is a mistake; and that the ruthless principle which Christ's Gospel has at last constrained us to abandon upon earth, reigns in heaven and through eternity.

I know that I shall be assured that the interests of the Universe demand this exhibition of the wrath of God against transgressors. But for whose benefit? All that can sin has been killed off! Who remains to profit by it? God's mind about sin was declared once and for ever to the whole Universe, when he made the soul of the incarnate Word an offering for the sins of the world. For whom is this spectacle of torment prepared? If I am assured, as Christian men have dared to say, that the saints will regard it with satisfaction, I call to mind two blessed ones whom the world honours with its profoundest reverence and love, praying that their names might be 'blotted out from the Book of Life,' if their sinning, perishing brethren might but be saved; and I picture them turning away from that holocaust of agony in heartbroken despair.

There is a third aspect of the doctrine, which concerns the principle on which the punishment is administered. This aspect presents it, to my mind, in colours, if possible, yet darker still. Men are kept alive and raised up at the resurrection, and tormented in a lake of fire, that Divine justice may have its full satisfaction, and *until* Divine justice is fully satisfied; and then they are swept to annihilation. We are told further, and most justly, that the decrees of God are not arbitrary; that it is not a

matter of will but of Divine necessity, the springs of which are internal, not external, to the nature of God, that He should exact the full penalty of transgression. The soul that sins must be visibly and terribly punished; in the nature of things, it is said, it must be so. I make no objection to this representation. I believe as solemnly as a man can believe that 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.' I believe in the full meaning of the Saviour's words, 'He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him;' though again I note that this is a misleading phrase if 'life' means only 'existence,' and the 'wrath of God' is to 'abide' on a creature who has utterly ceased to be.

These souls of sinners, then, are raised up that they may pass into the lake of fire. There they are to be tormented till they have paid the full penalty of their sin. What sin? Do they continue sinning? Each moment then adds to their guilt, and necessarily prolongs their punishment. Is sin in the other world a less guilty thing than sin in this world? If it was impossible that God should dispose of the sinner after the sin of this world by a stroke of annihilation, without these horrors of torment, how is it possible by this rule that the punishment of sin should ever end? Each moment is a fresh provocation of Divine wrath, a fresh challenge to God to heat the furnace hotter, and to press down more heavily His terrible hand.

If it be said that God is master of the demands of His own attributes, and may think after a time that the sinner has suffered enough and drop the merciful stroke, on what principle of justice is that possible after countless ages, during which there is constantly fresh sin demanding fresh punishment, and not possible at death, when one sharp stroke might end the sinner and his anguish for ever?

Again, the sinner is to be tormented until justice is satisfied, until the righteous Judge says 'Enough.' On what possible principle of righteousness can the sufferer, when he has suffered all, and has 'paid the last farthing,' be further doomed to annihilation? Justice has had its will—exacted its utmost. Has the atonement made on Calvary, 'that men might not perish but have everlasting life,' no help for them, then? Is the love of Christ the only power that becomes paralysed by the ages, and has the hand of Christ no strength to hold back the sufferers, when justice has done with them, from dropping dead into the pit?

Or, should the punishment soften them, and make them see the folly and madness of their rebellion, wakening some longing thought and hope in their tortured hearts that there may be mercy for them yet in the infinite and everlasting mercy, it were cruel, wanton mockery of bare justice to hand them over to destruction, when their punishment is ended and Justice has had her satisfaction, and deep dishonour to the love that seeks the 'broken reeds' and 'smouldering embers' to rescue,

restore, and save. What weary waste of desolation were this, that Heaven makes in the Universe, calling it peace! When the wretched souls have suffered all that is ordained, and Justice stays the tormentor's hand, then we are told that the God who swears by Himself that He 'desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his unrighteousness and live,' gives them no chance of turning, but sweeps them all out into the everlasting night. Is that what you expect us to believe?

One word more on this part of my subject before I pass on. I may be told that I am talking in ignorance of the destroying nature of sin; that it naturally blinds the eyes, dulls the senses, poisons life in the springs, and wears men down into moral and physical impotence and idiocy, so that at last there is a mere wreck, incapable of being saved. We none of us know much about this in its aspects and bearings beyond the grave. We can only see that sin seems as strong, and the devil as active, after all these ages as at first. But I take the picture as it is painted, and I sicken as I behold it. There are an innumerable multitude of wretched tortured creatures, whom Christ once so loved as to die to save them, dragging on a wasted, withered, idiotic existence, more pallid, ghastly, helpless, lifeless, as the periods of their punishment roll on; but kept alive, moping, mowing, looking out through bleared and soulless eyes on the great sea of agony around them, and dying still, till in sheer rottenness they drop into the pit. And as I gaze on this picture the thought

will rise, was there no hand in the Universe merciful enough to draw the sheet over this long and ghastly death-agony; had the eyes that rained tears on doomed Jerusalem no drops to shed on this vast world of living, writhing, festering corruption? Had the lips that once prayed even for the murderers, 'Father, forgive them,' no pleading entreaty, 'Drop the veil over this spectacle of horror; end this long, long death-agony by a merciful stroke! At least let them die at once and be buried in darkness; but this sight of the long suicide of sin is too horrible to be endured.'

I cannot trace the doctrine further: the heart saddens and sickens at the vision. The doctrine presents to us a picture of the dealings of the God who *is* Love, whose justice, holiness, and righteousness must therefore be the modes of His love, which I am persuaded would make those who paint it shudder, if they could fairly grasp it in all its bearings and issues; and which must drive men to embrace eagerly the alternative of atheism if they were shut up to believe in such a God.

And now we must endeavour to take a yet wider view of the bearings of the doctrine, and look at it in the light of the larger ideas of Revelation, and the methods and ends of God in the spiritual government of mankind.

I find the heart's core, the marrow, of the Gospel in the Lord's own words, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.' And lest any

should say, as Christian men in all ages have, alas! been quick to say, the world there means those predestined to believe, the Lord adds, 'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' What He meant by the world He declared by 'keeping company with publicans and sinners;' by 'seeking and saving the lost;' by bringing forth 'the best robe' for the returning prodigal, and calling 'the weary and heavy laden' to lay their burden on His heart. And lest the circle of an elect nation should claim Him and make in His own lifetime a caste of His kingdom, He lifted up His eyes over the wide world and declared, 'Many shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.'

I beg you to consider what this doctrine makes of the world-embracing love and purpose of the Lord. All perish at death who have not known and believed that 'Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' At death their life is done with; if it is prolonged it is because God chooses to prolong it, that they may suffer. The final scene is described in the following powerful words: 'How fearful and amazing the spectacle of the unregenerate things, arising in the nakedness and confusion of unpardoned sin, standing before God with the ghastly paleness of despair depicted on their countenances, and awaiting in direful silent agony the thunder of their great condemnation! There shall be ranged the unnumbered barbarous and

half-civilised nations, all that the northern hive has poured forth on the seats of luxury and commerce through 4,000 years; all the savage hordes of Central Asia; the ferocious warriors of teeming Africa, America, and the Pacific Isles. . . .'[1]

Well, if we are not to deny the faith, and to destroy the central idea of the Gospel, these are the beings whom the merciful Father, who sent them with a frail nature into a sinful world, so pitied and loved in their sin and wretchedness, that He who 'was with God, who was God,' endured unutterable anguish and intolerable shame to save them. He claimed them as His own by the awful sacrifice of Calvary; the great aim and work of His mediatorial kingdom is the bringing them to Himself. Now God forbid that, in pointing out the difficulties into which the doctrine of the annihilationists seems to plunge us, I should undervalue the difficulties which on any system beset the consideration of the state of the heathen, and the actual order or disorder of the world. There is difficulty enough everywhere; there is mystery enough everywhere, dark mystery, in which many a feeble faith gets lost. Christ loves these outcast heathen masses; and remember that we have heathen, ignorant heathen, within our own borders, while we speak of the great heathen world. Christ loves them, Christ died to save them, and yet generation after generation, age after age, millennium

[1] *Life in Christ*, p. 230.

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after millennium, the whole mass of them live, sin, suffer, die, without hearing His name, or feeling one soft touch of the mercy of His Gospel.

It is the fault of the Church, you say. But think of its being left at the mercy of such timid, halting, wrangling, selfish men and women as we are, we of the Church, I mean, whether the heathen in countless millions should pass from life to be tormented in the lake of fire, or should become, 'through union with the Prince of Life, component parts of the immortal system of the universe;'[1] to borrow a magniloquent description of that immortal caste, to which we are called, from which they are shut out. There is a deep mystery about it, but I can see a light shining through the gloom. If we are able to believe, on the ground not only of the hints which are dropped in Scripture, but on the broader ground of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, which 'will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth,' that in the future of the boundless Universe and of their immortal being, the truth here hidden from them may be made known, and the love on earth untasted may shed its purifying and quickening gifts on their souls, so that they too shall know, and feel, and be drawn to Christ before their destiny is settled—then some vision of the vast range of the system of mercy of which the Cross is the symbol elevates and gladdens

[1] *Life in Christ*, p. 185.

our hearts. We can understand, then, how in the vast scheme of Providence, which has eternity to work out its benignant designs, this 'casting away of some,' the great outcast heathen world, may be the beginning of a glorious ministry of mercy; and may be allowed, with all its present darkness and sadness, to draw forth and to educate that spirit of ministry which, caught from Christ, is to be the joyful task of the blessed in eternity. One can understand it if it is the preparation for the beyond.

But dare you believe, as this pitiless doctrine would compel you to believe, that God can mean what He says when He declares His love to the world, 'yea to the rebellious also,' and yet can leave the great world with all its teeming millions to perish in death, without even hearing the sound of His Gospel? And they die in death for ever to all hope of hearing it, or of knowing the meaning of mercy; for all that survives of these ignorant ones through death is but a half human nature, reserved for resurrection to judgment, the lake of fire, and the eternal night. It is utterly impossible to believe in the destiny of the mass of mankind which is thus presented, unless we are to expunge the love of God from the Gospel, and can expel mercy from the heart of Christ for ever.

And dare you contemplate this magnificent triumph of death? Death abolished by Christ! Why, death is the victor. Heaven may rejoice over its thousand rescued; hell over its ten thousand, nay, ten million, slain. Almighty love wrests a handful from destruction; hate,

mightier still than love, shrieks its pæan over the human hordes that it sweeps into the pit. I will not press the comparison between the quality of those in all ages who proclaim themselves the immortals, and the crowd which perishes like the brutes. But the 'angers that rage in celestial minds' have always conspicuously challenged the scornful attention of mankind. Tested by the pure touchstone of the life of Christ, few, few indeed, of the countless human throngs in any age wear the guise and breathe the breath of that immortal sphere. While the heart sickens at the thought of the innumerable priceless pearls of courage, honour, loyalty, devotion, self-sacrifice, and charity, which this doctrine would sweep wholesale into the pit—I claim them for Christ, and Christ will have them; though still, as of old, His wasteful disciples would drive them away.

I have described as an 'immortal caste' these possessors of a nature which relates them to the 'immortal system of the Universe,' while all other men belong with the brutes to the system which perishes in the dust. The phrase is objected to, because 'they are very humble, gentle, and diffident, and but seekers after life,' to whom it would apply. I regret that I must adhere to the term. Beings of a nature so essentially distinguished from humanity at large, cannot hide themselves under the veil of humility and self-distrust. The thing is a tremendous reality, if it is anything; a distinction so vast as that between the nature of the angels and the nature

of the beasts, cannot pass among men unnoted and unknown. It is a caste, and in its deadliest form—a spiritual caste; and the caste tone and temper tinges to my mind to a very painful extent almost the whole of the literature of the school which has passed under my notice. I gladly believe that this humility, gentleness, compassion, and charity is present largely in the hearts of its members. I pray them to make it more manifest in their word and doctrine, by believing that Christ has relations far closer and tenderer with these poor human outcasts whom they label the 'wicked' than any of them dream; and that He meant what He said, and all that He said, when He proclaimed the Gospel, 'God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that THE WORLD, through Him, might be saved.'

V.

THE GOSPEL OF LOVE.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.—1 *John* iii. 8.

LIFE in Christ! Here I am entirely at one with the school whose doctrine of annihilation seems to me equally degrading to man and dishonouring to God.[1] Their negations I protest against with all the energy which I can command; the great affirmation, life in Christ alone, I hold as firmly as they do to be God's truth. I may be permitted, however, to express my amazement at the attitude and tone of discoverers which they assume in proclaiming it. I find it so plainly written in the Gospel that whoso runs may read it; it is a truth broad and clear as the sunlight, and belongs not to a sect or a school, but to the universal Church: 'He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.' It is true for ever, true on earth, true in all ages, true in all worlds. But 'life' has manifestly in this passage a larger and nobler meaning than existence.

[1] Except that I protest against their miserably small and material interpretation of the word 'life.'

Life means that which makes existence blessed. The idea of the wrath of God abiding on a being who has no existence, is so incongruous that nothing but a very strong theological interest in a dogma could blind men to the incongruity. To live, for a spirit, is to know Him who is the Life; to be drawn to the fellowship of the mind and the spirit of Christ Jesus is to live, is to taste the joy of that life with a view to which God endowed the being whom He 'made in His own image' with an immortal nature, and which He has revealed to man in His Son.

'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' 'There is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved,' here or in any world. And this life in Christ is blessed and eternal. Let not your heart be troubled about this passage or that passage, as though your hope rested on a single sentence of the word of God. The testimony of the Bible as to the eternal beauty, joy, and glory of the life which is in Christ is not ample only, but exuberant. The life is one with Christ: 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' It is blessed as Christ's, it is eternal as Christ's: 'He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' I refer to these texts, which are but a few out of the many emphatic and pregnant passages which I might quote, in which the eternal blessedness of the righteous is presented as a truth firm and lasting as the throne of God, because I believe that a timid and selfish fear, lest if you set a limit to everlasting punishment you set also a limit to everlasting life, has

had a large influence in determining the doctrine of the Church. But the blessedness rests on foundations too firm to be shaken; while the term eternal, which, according to the balanced methods of Hebrew expression, freely employed by our Lord in parables—that is, poetic pictures and drapings of facts—is applied also to the punishment of the wicked, is open to such interpretations as we may be constrained to affix to it by the larger revelation of the whole word of God.

I believe, then, firmly with the writers who hold this theory of annihilation, that the only way of blessing to a human spirit is faith in Christ. To know Him is to live; to see in Him no beauty that we should desire Him, to have no sympathy with His life, no sense of His love, is to be dead while living, as Paul says, here or in any world.

The life which man was made to know and to enjoy, is born of the wedding of that which he is and has by nature to that which God imparts in Christ, that he may be born again, born into a new and blessed relation to the Father and to the spiritual and eternal world. It is the fruit of the blending of the human will with the Divine will, after the manner which Paul can only describe by what looks like a logical contradiction: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure.' And this was the purpose of God in the creation of man; he was made that he might be redeemed. He was made in

God's image, His child, in a sense which no other creature can even faintly share; but he was made a child that he might become in a yet higher sense a son, might enter into his Father's counsels, search the purposes of His mind, and respond to the yearnings of His heart, eternally. And to this life of sonship God calls the race. Man, as man, is chosen in Christ, and called. 'God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that the world through Him might be saved.' He 'will have all men to be saved;' He will have His Gospel 'preached to all nations;' and all, the most wretched, ignorant, and sinful everywhere, nay, even the murderers of the Prince of Life, He claims in Christ, and seeks, by ways that we little comprehend, to draw to His heart.

The question may fairly occur to those who see in evolution the key to the order of Creation, is not the struggle for life carried up to this higher sphere? Through all the ascending stages of Creation there is fierce struggle for existence; multitudes of the weaker perish that one stronger may survive, and struggle up to the next stage, to be crushed by a stronger in turn. Would it not be in harmony with this order, that great multitudes of these higher creatures, with their lofty endowments, should perish, in order that the strongest, the elect natures, might live on, and people this higher world? It is a thought which profanes wholly the mystery of Redemption, and puts the Saviour 'to an open shame.' The struggle for life rules through all the ascending stages of the Creation, with

a sternness which we should call terrible, but that the creatures are manifestly glad in their existence; no 'reason, looking before and after,' kills or even clouds their joy; while the result is a procession of life, ever onward and upward, which fills the heart with wonder and praise.

But the perpetuation of this principle as the principle of order and progress in the human sphere, the sphere of conscious, intelligent, forecasting, and intensely sensitive beings, would be simply horrible. In the human sphere, which this strain and struggle of the groaning Creation has evolved at last, a higher principle of order appears. In man the struggle for life ends, the ministry of life begins. As a creature sharing with the creatures, the struggle for existence enters as a powerful factor into man's life in this mortal sphere. But God meets him at once with a nobler lesson. He has embedded the first lines of it in the very constitution of our nature, He has brought forth the full form of it in the redemptive mission of His Son. In man there is the disposition and the desire to pity, to help, to save. Those Makololo who plunged in among the crocodiles to save the poor slave woman, were turning their backs on the struggle for existence, and their faces towards the ministry of life. And Christ explains and justifies it. He came to reveal man to himself; the Son of Man declares God's purpose in the form and the scale after which man's nature is made. The Highest came not to secure the survival of

the strongest, but the salvation of the weakest. The Son of Man 'came to seek and to save the lost.' 'Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.'

The recognition of this as the distinctly human quality, the function whereby the human asserts its relation to the higher, the spiritual world, is universal; men and peoples are called 'humane' who have it, 'inhuman' who have it not.. The order and development of society are based upon it. We call communities in a high sense civilised, in which this duty of the strong to the weak, this community of interests in classes, orders, and souls, receives some fair measure of recognition; and we estimate their true progress in civilisation, not by arts or arms, but by the welfare, the industry, order, intelligence, and growth, of the great mass of the community. This principle, the heart of which is love—love, the spring of which is Divine—is found to be that which compacts and edifies States. A nation composed of an order of freemen and a great herd of slaves, however cultivated, wealthy, and powerful it might seem, would have in it, as is now perfectly well understood, the seeds of all possible social

miseries and disorders, and of inevitable and rapid decay.

And it is a grand mistake to suppose that Christianity first made known this principle to man; like the still drearier mistake of imagining that man knew nothing of an immortal nature within him, till the Gospel proclaimed it. The Old Testament is full of the revelation of this principle of order. The structure of Jewish society was built upon it. Read Deuteronomy xv., Leviticus xxv., Psalms lxxii., Isaiah lviii. and lxi., and see how in the sight of God this was the key to the human order from the beginning; and how the whole aim of His education of humanity from the first, was to lift man consciously above the creature level to which the creature part of him naturally clings, and in which the struggle for existence reigns, and to train him to understand this higher law, this law of ministry, which is distinctly the law of the human sphere. That he might master and develop this law, God made man in His own image, and constituted him in his nature the link between two worlds.

And God, who calls man to this life with all its blessed burdens and glorious toils, comes forth to help him. He gives to him both the pattern and the inspiration of this cherishing compassion, this healing, helping, and saving purpose and endeavour, by the manifestation of His own all-enduring, all-sacrificing love. There is One in the Universe who must 'in all things have the pre-eminence,' the First-born, 'by whom the Father made the worlds;'

He became for us, that He might lead us in the higher path, the first-born of ministry; He was first in toil, in burden, in pain, in sorrow, in fear, in death, that He might be the first, the leader of the band, of the healers, the helpers, the saviours, here and throughout eternity. In revealing the life, this higher human life, to which man rises by the fellowship of the Son of God, and which is truly described as a renewing, a renewing of man after the image of Him that created him, the Lord revealed Love: 'Hereby have we knowledge of love, because He laid down His life for us.' The highest, the Son of God, 'came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' It was not an expedient to meet an accidental fracture of the Divine purpose in the Creation; it is everywhere set forth as the manifestation of that which is most Godlike in God; that which He is, essentially and eternally—Love, Love that must ever seek and save.

In working out the Father's everlasting purposes of mercy, the Lord endured joyfully unutterable anguish and shame. That He might lift the burden of sin from guilt-crushed consciences, He took on Himself the whole weight of it; though He groaned under it in a horror of darkness, in which the sense even of the Father's love was for the moment lost. That He might be able to save to the uttermost each helpless and wretched sinner of our race, He became 'bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh;' He fathomed to the depths all experiences of

human care, pain, and bitterness, and drank the cup of life's sorrow to the dregs. Rising, He bore our human nature, with all the rich experience which He had won, 'to the heavenly places,' where He reigns on His mediatorial throne, wearing still the stigmata of Calvary, to make the purpose of the Incarnation and Passion triumphant; to make the love which 'endured the cross and despised the shame,' the supreme power in this Universe, pitying, helping, healing, saving, ruling, in all worlds and through all eternity. And this is the life of God—He is God the Saviour. This legend is ever on His crown, 'Mighty to save.' 'For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth,' saith the Lord God; 'wherefore turn yourselves and live ye.' 'He keepeth truth for ever,' the truth of His nature, the truth of His purposes; He cannot change, He cannot lie, He cannot repent. He is love; He must save.

And now in the light of that everlasting mercy which has its spring in the inner essential nature of God, look at your theology either of eternal torment, or of vindictive torment for a season and then the doomsman's stroke at last. God loves the poorest and wretchedest sinners of our race with a tenderness of which Calvary is the measure. He says that His anguish over the self-wrought misery of sinners is that of the Father over his youngest born, his darling, starving in rags in a far country, and fighting for the husks with swine. Has any of you a prodigal in the wilderness? You know what a father's

heart is, you know what a father's home is, while he riots and starves. Great God! What would you not give now to clasp him to your heart! And the theory of even what is called a moderate Calvinism, the theory in which our churches in vain try to find rest, is this: that God, who is rich in mercy, and who loves even the rebellious with an everlasting love—sterner terms cannot be used of any human transgression, than those with which the prophets denounce the sins of Israel, while they declare that God's redeeming mercy clings to them still—who cannot forsake, who will not cast off, holds to this purpose through the few years of this mortal pilgrimage, seeking and saving the lost, but then, when death has rounded our little life, drops the purpose, and watches the vast majority of the race He loved even unto death, writhing and wasting in unutterable misery through the countless ages of a never-ending eternity. Man made originally for Redemption; the Redemptive purpose cherished by God from eternity; all the forces and influences of the Universe arrayed for its accomplishment; the dear Son of His love dying voluntarily in agony and shame to make that purpose triumphant; the risen Christ passing into the heavens to carry on and to complete the Mediator's work, to gather together all things, in all spheres, under His headship, as St. Paul declares—and all operative to save through a span of time which is likened to a moth's existence, impotent to save through all the ages of eternity.

You say God is just as well as merciful; here His mercy reigns, there His justice. Yes, God is just, blessed be His name, therefore the Atonement, wherein 'mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.' But consider what you are saying in limiting God's mercy to this life, and giving to His justice the exclusive rule through eternity. It is nowhere written, God is Justice; it is written, God *is* Love. Justice is His attribute; Love is Himself. And what you affirm, if your interpretation of Scripture be true, is that Incarnate Justice is merciful for the moments of this life, but that the instant the death-stroke falls it seizes again the sword and the scourge, and wields them thenceforth ruthlessly through the ages of eternity. For each being whom Christ died to save, whom He loves with an everlasting love—'I have graven them on the palms of My hands;' it was man's name that He engraved there on Calvary—there is a moment of mercy, and then an eternity of stern, pitiless justice, which must harden itself for ever against sights and sounds of anguish, which might break a heart of stone! Not so have I learned Christ.

'For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.' What are the works of the devil in our world? 'Sinners,' is the ready answer; and on some such answer the whole annihilationist theory seems to rest. Nay, not the sinners, but the sin. But, it may be objected, did not Christ call

the sinful Jews of His time the children of the devil? Yes; giving them thereby an awful warning of the headship which they were choosing in rejecting His. But those very Jews, in one of the grandest passages of the New Testament, He calls 'His own:' 'He came unto His own.' Those very Jews He was loving so tenderly that He was treading for them that moment the path to Calvary. For those very Jews, before many days were past, He was praying, 'Father, forgive them,' as they pierced Him and scoffed at His dying agonies; and to those very Jews His Gospel was first preached with a power which brought them in heart-broken penitence to the seat of His mercy; and His very murderers He raised through death to stand justified and sanctified, the first-fruits of His triumph before His glorious throne. 'God is angry with the wicked every day;' 'His wrath against them burns like fire.' But while His wrath burns against their sin, His love burns for their salvation. Their sin is the devil's work, their souls are His offspring; them He ever seeks and ever must seek to save, their sin He seeks and ever must seek, as the work of the devil, to destroy.

Can anything be more miserable than the picture of reconciliation, 'the reconciliation of all things,' 'Christ all in all,' which the annihilationists present to us? There are some who, unlike the majority of the school, believe in the possibility of future ministries of mercy. They tell us that the annihilationists alone can put a true meaning on the passages which proclaim the reconcilia-

tion of all things to Christ. Yes; the reconciliation of all things by the destruction of multitudes whom Christ died to reconcile. A sweeping stroke of destruction, and then all is reconciled and restored. Have you loved and lost? Have you a passionate longing

> To feel the touch of a vanish'd hand
> And the sound of a voice that is still?

Do tears rush unbidden to your eyes as you number your dear ones, and one, the prodigal it may be, is not? Ah! you never loved and sought like Christ, yet your heart strains to and yearns for the lost! May God keep me from delighting in the thought of a reconciliation, a 'restoration of all things,' which is to be consecrated by a sentence of annihilation! I think that the memory of that doomsman's stroke would be burnt into my shuddering brain for ever and for ever.

No; the constant and solemn assurance of God's word that His mercy is everlasting, that His nature is love, that His tenderness to sinners is ineffable, while His chastisement of their sin is stern and dire, together with the revelation of the purpose and the hope with which He redeemed the world, as set forth in many glorious passages of His word, compel me to believe that this Universe is the theatre of boundless and endless ministries of mercy, working through pain to blessed issues; that the love which won the sceptre on Calvary will wield it as a power, waxing ever, waning never, through all the ages; and that the Father will never cease from yearning over the prodigals, and Christ will never cease from seeking

the lost, while one knee remains stubborn before the name of Jesus, and one heart is unmastered by His love.

And now we can face the vision of the terrible pain which saddens the outlooks of life as disclosed in the Divine word. It is not Christ's will, but man's will, that it should be endured. There is pain everywhere, from the writhing worm, up to the great Spirit whom your transgression wounds and grieves; life develops itself, and spirit fulfils its ministry, through pain. The pain in the lower region springs from the struggle for existence; in the higher, the region of human endeavour and aspiration, the holier pain of life springs from the effort to live like God. And there is the pain of the fallen, the faithless; the spirit wedded to the base and perishing; the soul cleaving to the dust. The agony of the hunger of a spirit feeding on ashes, of the heir herding with swine, of the man born 'to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever,' grovelling like the beasts, passes all forms of anguish but one, which a man can endure. To know love and to hate it, to see Christ and to scorn Him, to hear the call to heaven and to set the face hellwards, to trample down convictions, aspirations, yearnings, hopes, and to go out into the night knowing that you have crucified Christ afresh and put Him to an open shame—this is to go down to the darkness and horror of the pit; this is to taste the torment of hell.

And say not, this is a dark, terrible side of the religion of Christ. The Bible reveals the horror, but does not create it; it is in man, in the constitution of things, in

the system of the Universe; the anguish of sin is the torment of the life of all peoples, it impels men to the most terrible cruelties, the most frantic excesses, that stain the blood-red page of history. It is not Christian peoples who will swing with a hook through their quivering flesh, or lie crushed beneath the wheels of the murderous car, if they may but wash the sin stains from their consciences, or lift their crushing burden from their hearts. There is no picture which you can paint of the torment of sin which man's apprehension, when conscience is fairly aroused and resolute, will not exaggerate: there is no sentence which you can pass to which his righteous instinct will not say amen. This springs out of the dread endowment of freedom; the spirit which may be lifted in freedom, willing, loving, to share the ineffable glory and bliss of the Redeemer, can degrade itself in freedom to a shame and a misery which might touch the pity of the fiends. It is a dread endowment; whole peoples have shrunk from it, have shuddered at it. But God presses it upon us by the very constitution of our nature; He will have none of us abdicate it, because He can bring the resources of an infinite and everlasting love to bear on its determinations, and has eternity before Him to work out the results.

But because of this large scale and boundless range of our nature He can bring himself to the infliction of long and terrible pain. The Scriptures open to the wilful sinner who has seen and hated the love, a vision of

'eternal death.' It is a mistake to associate the idea of duration necessarily with the word eternal. Those who will look into it will find that there is no great word of Scripture which is used with more various shades of meaning, and with less of strict definition. In truth it describes the sphere into which our definitions do not run. When employed with the word death it presents the estate of the godless spirit: a horror of great darkness around it, godless, lifeless, hopeless for ever. I believe that the hardened sinners who turn from the light and hate the Son, who will not have the blessed and the merciful to be their king, doom themselves—Heaven but registers the sentence—to this experience of eternal death. They are doomed to know all that it means to be Christless, hopeless, lifeless, in any sense that makes life a possession; to feel all the horror of that God-forsaken darkness which cast its dread shadow for a moment over the Lord. The tenderness which they slighted, the love which they spurned, the truth which they scoffed at, the glory and the bliss which they lost, burnt into their shuddering memory, as they discover all that lies for a spirit in the devil's headship, through what is to them as eternity.

It is a vision before which we tremble and are meant to tremble; 'it is a fearful thing' for a rebellious spirit 'to fall into the hands of the living God.' But the burden, which would else be too crushing, is lifted in a measure from our spirits, as we see around, above, beyond

this dread experience, the boundless and everlasting ministries of mercy, drawing the sinner through the depths of anguish, to the light, to the home, to the heart of God. Man plunged in the horror of the darkness of the sin that he cleaves to—the everlasting mercy around and beyond him still.

And now I must set before you the principle on which I interpret the threatenings of eternal penalties, everlasting sufferings, which lie sparely but plainly on the face of the Divine word. I interpret them precisely on the principle on which experience compels, I should rather say instructs, us—it should need no compulsion—to interpret the original sentence on transgressors, which was clear, explicit, and stern as these: 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' We see boundless ministries of mercy working through terrible anguish, through all the pain and strain of earth's sad history, between the sentence and its execution. Adam lived on, lives on in glorious bliss. Was the sentence, then, an idle word, a vague threat, forgotten the moment that it had passed from the awful lips? Nay; God meant it to the depth. It expressed the natural, and, as far as nature's possibilities were concerned, the inevitable issue of transgression. Sinning, man began at once to taste of death. It lay in the natural necessity of things; from death the sinner could create, could find, no way of escape. But there was a yet diviner necessity which dominated the natural; that whereby it became the Creator who dowered

the human with freedom, to become its Saviour, to find its ransom, to save it 'from going down into the pit.' At the heart of this necessity the Divine love was glowing, and in the path of this necessity lay the 'cross and passion, the death and burial, the resurrection and ascension' of the incarnate God. So here the threatening is meant to its depths. Sin, anguish—while sin exists. It is the sentence which is written in the constitution of man and of all things; sin and suffering are indissolubly wedded, while God lives, while eternity endures. But the sentence is not the master of mercy. The strong One in the Universe is God, and 'God is Love.'

Just as in the case of the first sentence on the first transgressor, God found the way, though through awful anguish to Himself and to the sinner, of maintaining His law and saving His child, so through the terrible pain and despair of which sin must be the parent, to free beings who hunger for its baits and listen to its lies, ministries of mercy, resting on the Atonement, shall in like manner be ever seeking to master nature by spirit, sin by grace, hate by love. The sentence on sin is not a penalty which it pleases God to fix, and which it may please Him at any moment to unfix; it is a yet more dread reality. Suffering is not the penalty *on* sin, it is the fruit *of* sin; sin is its bitter fountain, and *must* well it forth so long as it endures.

Destruction of sinners! I believe in it profoundly. There is a Divine and blessed way of destroying sinners, by

destroying sin. The sinner perishes; the son is saved. When David uttered such tremendous curses against his enemies and God's, was it the souls of men which he hated and would joyfully see exterminated? Or was it the hateful lusts, passions, and malignities which hindered and opposed his work for his realm and for God's? Could each one of those foes on whom his anathema fell have been brought to repentance, to loving, loyal submission to God and to His king, would not David have felt with abounding joy that the deepest wish of his heart was most blessedly fulfilled? And God would have been the teacher who taught His servant to take such joy in such a destruction of his foes. And this is the key to the great drama of man's freedom through all the ages of the future. The sentence, stern, absolute, irrevocable, against sinners; the merciful Christ wielding the power which He won on Calvary to draw them through the anguish to His everlasting home and rest.

'God wills all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.' Yes, you tell me, but man's sinful nature withstands it; man's will to sin frustrates this will of God. Should it be so incredible, then, that when the sentence is passed man's submission may withstand it, and grace may triumph, so that the merciful will may have free course at last? Is this an idea which should waken bitter opposition in many a so-called Christian heart? Is a sentence of anguish, then, the one thing that can know no resistance, no reversal, over which no benign

ministries of mercy, though Christ's everlasting love be their fountain, can prevail through eternity?

Wisely writes the late Mr. Gilbert in his 'Lectures on the Atonement,' delivered when I was young, in the series of Congregational lectures which were regarded as props of orthodoxy in their times: 'As a threatening has not strictly the binding power of an engagement, so neither has it strictly the power of a prediction.' 'The attempt to prove that the Divine Being is as much obliged to fulfil His threatenings as His promises must be manifestly futile, since while He ever abides faithful to the one, we have the evidence of fact that He doth not hold Himself equally bound by the other.'[1]

But this doctrine of mercy, this vision of the ministries of the love which won on Calvary its power to save, through all the spheres of being, through all the ages of the future, is hateful to multitudes who call themselves disciples. Many true-hearted believers may be honestly distressed by it, because, having confined their thoughts mainly to a particular class of passages, they conceive that it contradicts the plain teaching of the word of God. But there are many who rage against it in what I cannot but call a malignant spirit, and fling their little shafts against any who would gladly bind it to their hearts.

I read in one of these annihilationist writers an indignant complaint, that if these ministries of mercy be

[1] The principle here set forth seems to me to be equally valid for eternity as for time.

possible through the long ages, he, and saints like him might be compelled to sit down, some day, in a far-off, futurity, with men whose names are held in Christian execration, in the Kingdom of God. The words 'Shame! shame!' as I read it, rose instinctively to my lips. The elder son, who 'was angry and would not go in,' is still abroad amongst us in Christendom. Well might the Saviour say, 'Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, will He find faith upon the earth?' Will He find disciples who believe the simplest, the most fundamental principle of His Gospel, and who know that the yearning passion of His heart is the passion to seek and to save the lost? How many among 'His own' will He find exulting in the thought that 'this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood; wherefore He is able to save even to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them,' in all the ages, in all the spheres.

I hold, then, that the anguish of sin lies in the very nature of sin, and that the sentence declares God's eternal counsel that the sinner must bear his curse, his hell, with him wherever he moves. But I hold that that ordinance which for ever weds sin with suffering has a mind of mercy in it and not of vengeance, and that the purpose and the end of all the terrible suffering that fills the Universe is the training of free men to know the essential misery of transgression, to hate it, to shudder at it as they shudder at death; that they may know the love, the life, in which

it is God's purpose that they shall be eternally blessed. I see before me a great vision of pain; the suffering of free spirits is not ended here. Nay, it is manifest that the righteous here have not finished their education; multitudes of good men pass to the gate of death laden with infirmity, with graces smirched and virtues crippled; halting disciples, whose culture has to be carried on and perfected on high. There will be struggle and discipline for many of us, but we shall bear it joyfully in the radiant light of hope, and in the cherishing, quickening atmosphere of love.

But multitudes, haters of their own souls, lovers of the gates of death, will pass out to learn what death means. 'Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard' the joys, the glories of the sons in the kingdom of their Father; 'eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard' the agonies which the rebels doom themselves to endure. But we can bear to look upon the vision. t is not the hand of an Almighty tormentor, in vengeance for ever crushing the hopeless; it is the stern chastisement of a righteous Father, which aims at breaking the rebel and saving the son. When I see that the love which suffered on Calvary has won the right to urge its plea, to wield its power, to win its triumphs, in all the ages, in all the worlds, all the horror seems to pass out of the agony through which the sinning creature may yet have to struggle, in being born into the world of everlasting and glorious liberty and joy. The grandeur of the scale on

which our nature is fashioned and the range of its destiny explain the cost at which it shall be redeemed, that it may people all the mansions of eternity.

There are those who see further. They read in passage after passage, notably in Paul's later epistles, when the prophet eye had clearer range through the mist of death, a vision unfolded of a universal restoration. Sin destroyed, love triumphant; all beings, all things, through all the boundless spheres, gathered under the Headship of Christ; freely fulfilling the Father's commandment, at rest in the bosom of the Saviour's love. If that be a vision of hope, the hope that heaven cherishes as its most sacred possession, the hope in which the Creator saw 'subjected to vanity' the worlds which He had made, I share the joyful inspiration. But if it is asserted that here is a Divine decree, whereby God determines that when the sin and the suffering have endured through the space of His patience He will put forth His power and end them, bidding the sinner cease from sinning, and rounding the era of freedom by the proclamation of an age of universal serenity and peace; if that is what is meant, and that is the assertion of Universalism, it seems to me to throw a terrible unreality about the drama of freedom, about all the struggle, travail, groaning, and anguish of the world. It seems to me to rob the life of moral liberty of that dignity, that control of destiny, which alone explain the suffering that it endures. It makes man in his freedom seem perilously like the puppet of a master showman,

who leads forth as it pleases him, and stays when it pleases him, the procession of the sins and the sorrows of mankind.

If man wills to sin on, it is the awful prerogative of his nature to be able to sin on, and to perpetuate the struggle and the sorrow of life. It is the shadow of sadness over the Universe, which God has chosen in His good pleasure to dower with this dread inheritance. It is the possibility which was born when the head of a race of free men was brought forth into the world. The glorious powers, and the possibilities of development into forms of God-like strength and beauty, which God the Redeemer has brought forth, and evermore brings forth, from this world of human travail, fill the Universe with exulting joy and adoring songs. But always this shadow haunts it and must haunt it, till the last rebellious spirit has bent the knee at the name of Jesus, and entered into life through His love.

There are those who believe that a Divine decree has ordained both that end and that time. But we are here out of the sphere of omnipotent power and sovereign decrees. God, in creating the world of freedom, self-limited the ruling powers of His kingdom to the light of His truth and the might of His love. Here we must leave it. We have no power to formulate the doctrine of 'the last things.' Our knowledge must, in any case, be too narrow and vague to make our definitions clear and our dogmas sure; therefore the field of vision is wisely

left with the shadows on it, through which we see the sons passing up to complete their training, the rebels passing down to learn all that may be meant by death, and Christ's mercy, pregnant with redeeming influence as ever, folding round and brooding over all. My hope for the future of the human, the race, the world, which Christ died to redeem, is my faith in the everlasting power of the blood of atonement to purify, quicken, and save. I dare not interpret the sentence as a decree of torment. So neither can I interpret the purpose and the hope as a decree of restoration. I leave the future of man where I leave my own, with Him whose ways are too deep, too high, too large for my little understanding, but who, while He loves—and He is Love—can never cease to yearn over sinners; while He lives—and He is Life—can never cease to seek that He may save.

And now I have finished the task which I set myself, and which it has cost me more to carry through than many of you dream. What may be the immediate issue to myself and to my ministry I know not; necessity has been laid upon me to speak, and the issue is out of my hands. But it pains me deeply to cause distrust and anxiety to any who look to me for teaching; and it cannot but be that some will be perplexed and troubled, by these larger views of the range of the one everlasting Gospel, 'repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,' and of the future eternal ministries of redeeming love. Some will be troubled and some will

fall away. I feel that such crises as these are times of searching to congregations, and they are times which are needed. A state of easy prosperity is good neither for communities nor for souls. Seasons of anxiety and perplexity, of searchings of Scripture and searchings of heart, may be ordained in mercy. There are many, I fear, who will think that I have robbed their Christianity of a terror to which they largely trusted, as an instrument to frighten men from sin, and to drive them into the Saviour's fold. I trust that they will find, when they look into it a little more closely, that I have endeavoured to substitute the fear of a father for the dread of a tyrant, the fear which makes sons, for the terror which makes slaves or brutes.[1] But we shall soon have grown out of this dependence on terror. The very parable of Dives, which is constantly used in this discussion, was manifestly meant as a warning of its impotence. The blessedness of right-doing, the wretchedness of wrong-doing, now and ever, is the Christian doctrine; and the time is coming when this truth, and not the terrors, will wield the chief power over human consciences and hearts.

Those who have been long familiar with my ministry —in fifteen months I shall have been for thirty years the minister of this congregation, and there are those here who have been with me from the first—will find nothing startling in this counsel of God, which step by step I

[1] The brutalising influence of the popular doctrine on the manners and morals of Christendom is a subject which has yet to be explored.

have been led to see and to declare. It lies latent in the idea of God's Fatherhood of the great human family, the preaching of which, some twenty years ago, involved me in so much painful opposition and controversy; through which stormy time my congregation stood by me with an affection and constancy, which has always led me to magnify the freedom and the power of the position which is occupied by the minister of an Independent church. Step by step God's counsel has unfolded itself before me, and in my last book on 'The Higher Life' there was the germ of all which I have now proclaimed. Those who have followed me thus far in my ministry have nothing to recant or unlearn in receiving this doctrine; they have simply 'to follow on to know the truth.' But some will fall away. If it is love for what they believe to be the truth of Christ's Gospel which leads them to forsake my ministry, I beg them to believe that I shall honour their loyalty to what they conceive to be the Master's teachings, as heartily as I call upon them to honour mine. I am prepared for whatever results my fidelity to my convictions and to the truth of the Gospel may bring. I could not speak otherwise than as I have spoken; the rest I leave with God.

But I plead once more for my younger brethren, to many of whom this subject is a source of keen mental anguish, and whose position, whose prospects, whose very life, may depend on the sympathy with which the struggles of their minds towards the truth may be met. If they

preach Christ, if you see that His love manifestly constrains them, if the one aim of their ministry is to draw men to closer fellowship with His spirit, honour them, cherish them, strengthen them; do not frown on them and forsake them, if the hope gladdens their hearts that Christ's dear love may have blessed ministries of mercy to accomplish through all the ages and in all the worlds.

And I would that my word might reach the elders, the leaders of our religious communities and of our great societies, and I may speak as myself almost an elder. Unless they are prepared for the breaking up of our churches and the shattering of our institutions, they must allow this to be an open question, to be freely discussed, thought out, and brought forth into the sun. Where the subject so transcends the range of our imagination, and where the sphere of knowledge is necessarily so vague and dim, where the language of Scripture is open to such varieties of interpretation, and has hints and suggestions which we all feel to be beyond the grasp of our thought, they must be willing to allow their younger brethren to follow these suggestions in the direction to which the love of God in Christ may appear to guide them, nor be grieved if they seek to strengthen themselves with the hope which 'Paul the aged' in his last years would seem to have clasped very closely to his heart.

I have spoken strongly on this doctrine of annihilation; I have uttered the pent-up convictions of years. If I have spoken too strongly and hardly, and have wounded

any, I pray them to forgive me. But I have been especially desirous to keep names and persons out of the controversy, and have always been most careful to specify the precise form of the doctrine at which my opposition was aimed. In one sense the Church owes a great debt of gratitude to this school of thinkers; they have persisted in fixing attention on a monstrous and incredible doctrine. Many of them I can well believe sought these untenable dogmas as a refuge; I can only pray that they may be led on to what the Gospel compels me to believe is a larger and more blessed, because more Christian, truth.

But enough of men. I plead for Christ, for the honour of His name, for the power of His salvation, for the glory of His cross, for the endless and boundless ministries of that Redemption, the virtue of which we are asked to believe is stricken to impotence by the hand of Death. I plead for the hope of the destruction of the work of the devil in the Universe, by the salvation of all that bears trace of the touch of the hand of God. Sin withered under the curse of the souls that were once its victims; the devil spoiled of his dark dominion, not by the fiat of omnipotent will, but by the hand of omnipotent love. Hell destroyed; Christ triumphant; gathering the fruits of His Cross and Passion here and in all the worlds!

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